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THE Heart CRIES OUT

by VAL NEWELL

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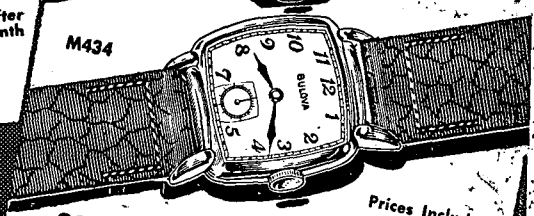

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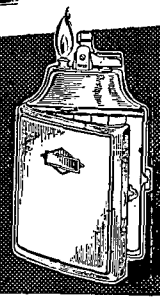

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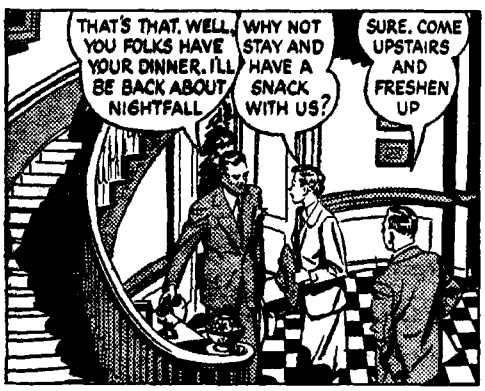
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THIS BLADE SURE MAKES SHORT WORK OF WHISKERS. MY FACE FEELS GREAT!
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The Best in Romantic Fiction

NEW LOVE MAGAZINE

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PEGGY GRAVES
Editor

ALL STORIES NEW

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POPULAR FILMS

Palmer Picks:

For Comedy-Romance: "The Connecticut Yankee" with Bing Crosby, Rhonda Fleming, William Bendix, Sir Cedric Hardwicke. (Paramount). Technicolor.

Mark Twain would never recognize his Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court but Crosby's fans—and how many aren't?—will recognize this as another of Bing's amiable comedies with songs.

Bing, a New England blacksmith, awakens in the time of King Arthur and his Round Table—year 585. "Captured" by Sir Sagamore (William Bendix)—a knight in squeaky armor—Bing is brought before King Arthur (Sir Cedric Hardwicke) as a monster from the outer world. Bing saves his life by performing "miracles"—burning a hole with a magnifying glass, lighting matches, etc. He falls in love with the King's niece (Rhonda Fleming) and fights with her jealous fiance in a hilarious joust where he proves that a lasso and a good cow pony are mightier than the lance.

Everybody will enjoy Crosby's wise-cracks and the clowning of Bendix and Hardwicke.

• • •

For Adventure: "Canadian Pacific" with Randolph Scott and Jane Wyatt. (20th Century-Fox). Cinecolor.

Building this famous Canadian railroad was more than just ties and trestles—at least according to this version where it takes six-guns and two-fisted action by Tom Andrews (Randolph Scott) to overcome bad whites and renegade Indians.

Although Andrews has a temporary love affair with a female doctor (Jane Wyatt) in the railroad camp, it is his own true love, a French-Indian girl, who warns him of the Indians' plan to attack the camp. Andrews goes on a private sortie to prevent the signal for the attack from being given and gets the ringleaders—but too late.

(Continued on page 98)

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"I WAS ASHAMED OF MY FACE

until Viderm made my dreams of a clearer skin come true in one short week"

(FROM A LETTER TO BETTY MEMPHIS SENT HER BY ETHEL JORDAN, DETROIT, MICH.)

BETTY MEMPHIS

If your face is broken out, if bad skin is making you miserable, here is how to stop worrying about pimples, blackheads and other externally caused skin troubles.

JUST FOLLOW SKIN DOCTOR'S SIMPLE DIRECTIONS

By Betty Memphis

"I just want to be alone!" Is there anything more awful than the blues that come when your face is broken out and you feel like hiding away because of pimples, blackheads and similar externally caused skin troubles? I know how it feels from personal experience. And I can appreciate the wonderful, wonderful joy that Ethel S. Jordan felt when she found something that not only *promised* her relief—but *gave* it to her in just one short week!

When I was having my own skin troubles, I tried a good many cosmetics, ointments and whatnot that were recommended to me. I remember vividly how disappointed I felt each time, until I discovered the skin doctor's formula now known as the Double Viderm Treatment. I felt pretty wonderful when friends began to rave about my "movie-star skin." No more self-consciousness. No more having my friends feel sorry for me. The secret joy, again, of running my fingertips over a smoother, clearer skin.

Many women shut themselves out of the thrills of life—dates, romance, popularity, social and business success—only because sheer neglect has robbed them of the good looks, poise and feminine self-assurance which could so easily be theirs. Yes, everybody looks at your face. The beautiful complexion, which is yours for the asking, is like a permanent card of admission to all the good things of life that every woman craves. And it really can be yours —*take my word for it!*—no matter how discouraged you may be this very minute about those externally caused skin miseries.

A screen star's face is her fortune. That's why she makes it her business to protect her complexion against pimples, blackheads and blemishes. Your face is no different. Give it the Double Treatment it needs and watch those skin blemishes go away.

What Makes "Bad Skin" Get That Way?

Medical science gives us the truth about how skin blemishes usually develop. There are small specks of dust and dirt in the air all the time. When these get into the open pores in your skin, they can in time "stretch" the pores and make them large enough to pocket dirt particles, dust and infection. These open pores become infected and bring you the humiliation of pimples, blackheads or other blemishes. Often, the natural oils that lubricate your skin will harden in the pores and result in unsightly blemishes.

When you neglect your skin by not giving it the necessary care, you leave yourself wide open to externally caused skin miseries. Yet proper attention with the Double Viderm Treatment may mean the difference between enjoying the confidence a fine skin gives you or the embarrassment of an ugly, *un*beautiful skin that makes you want to hide your face.

The Double Viderm Treatment is a formula prescribed with amazing success by a dermatologist and costs you only a few cents daily. This treatment consists of two jars. One contains Viderm Skin Cleanser, a jelly-like formula which penetrates your pores and acts as an antiseptic. After you use this special Viderm Skin Cleanser, you simply apply the Viderm Fortified Medicated Skin Cream. You rub this in, leaving an almost invisible protective covering for the surface of your skin.

This double treatment has worked wonders for so many cases of external skin troubles that it may help you, too —*in fact, your money will be refunded if it doesn't.* Use it for only ten days. You have everything to gain and nothing to lose. It is a guaranteed treatment. Enjoy it. Your dream of a clearer, smoother complexion may come true in ten days or less.

Use your Double Viderm Treatment every day until your skin is smoother and clearer. Then use it only once a week to remove stale make-up and dirt specks that infect your pores, as well as to aid in healing external irritations. Remember that when you help prevent blackheads, you also help to prevent externally caused skin miseries and pimples.

Just mail your name and address to Betty Memphis, care of the New York Skin Laboratory, 206 Division Street, Dpt. G1, New York 2, N. Y. By return mail you will receive the doctor's directions, and both

jars, packed in a safety-sealed carton. On delivery, pay two dollars plus postage. If you wish, you can save the postage fee by mailing the two dollars with your letter. Then, if you are in any way dissatisfied, your money will be cheerfully refunded. To give you an idea of how fully tested and proven the Viderm Double Treatment is, it may interest you to know that, up to this month, over two hundred and thirty-one thousand women have ordered it on my recommendation. If you could only see the thousands of happy, grateful letters that have come to me as a result, you would know the joy this simple treatment can bring. And, think of it!—the treatment *must* work for you, or it doesn't cost you a cent.

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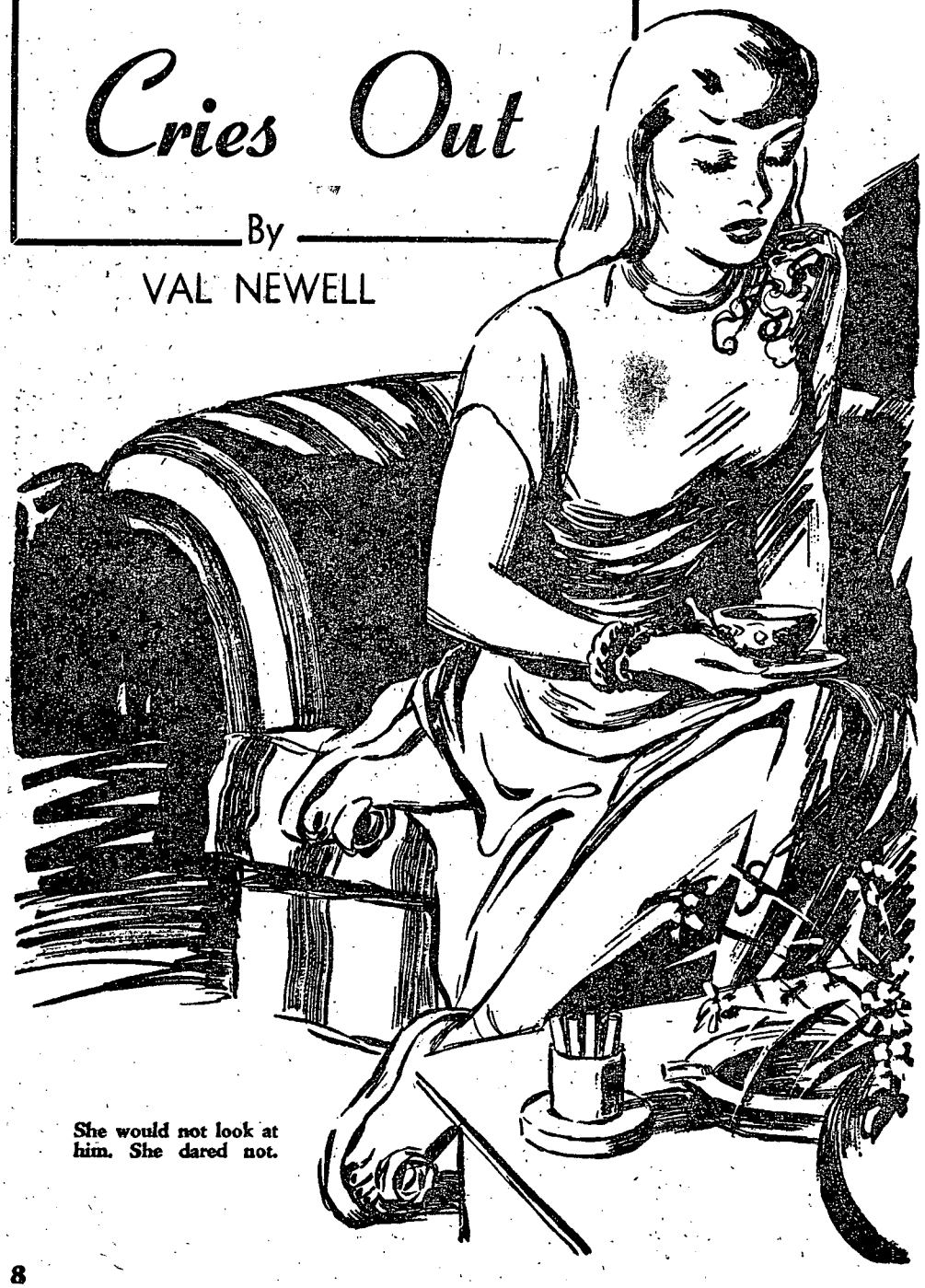
The Heart Cries Out

By VAL NEWELL



She would not look at him. She dared not.

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But who will answer a lady with a past?

CHAPTER ONE

Kicked-Around Heart

THEY SAID LORI BRENT was a real nice girl, but hard. When she was seventeen she had fallen in love. It hadn't worked out. When she was eighteen, she fell again. That didn't work either. When she was twenty . . .

"I'm in love with you," Carl said.

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"What are you going to do about that?"

They sat in a parked car that June night a hundred yards from the Encinal Canyon Country Club. The sky was surly, the moon hidden, the atmosphere terribly oppressive.

Lori, who looked cool and lovely in light blue lace that made you realize her eyes were blue instead of black, murmured, "I think it's going to rain."

Carl groaned. "Good grief, are you that desperate for something to say about it?"

His arms went around her. He drew her deliberately close. He kissed her . . .

Lori thought, her eyes closed while her heart went on beating steadily and evenly, I suppose I ought to be married sometime.

Carl was a good bet. He remembered things like corsages and opening car doors. He tipped waiters generously, but with one eye on the service. He had a very good job as a credit investigator, and thought a substantial bank balance was more important than a smart address.

Besides, he was in love with her. That counted, didn't it?

He said against her lips, "Stop thinking, dammit."

"I'm not . . ."

"You're clicking away at five thousand revs a minute—things you already know. I've a good job. I'm in love with you, and I can use my head. Okay. So will you marry me?"

"I don't know," Lori whispered. "You never asked me before."

"I'm asking you now."

Her arms slipped around his neck. "Kiss me again . . ."

He did. It lasted a long time. It was nice. But it was not heaven. Definitely, it was an expert, well-handled kiss that was interesting but not out of this world.

When Kenny Terrill had kissed her a couple of years ago, she had zoomed right off the planet.

Kenny . . .

Feeling a bit sick, she pulled out of Carl's arms. Automatically her hands smoothed down the sleek pale gold of her hair. Nobody wore pageboy coiffures any more. Nobody but Lori, who wore what she pleased and kept a three-deep circle of men around her all the time.

"Never mind," Carl murmured, watching her, "you're still dream stuff."

"But you aren't dreaming."

"No. In my dreams you don't pull away." And then he added with a tinge of bitterness, "But only in my dreams."

Lori's dark blue eyes were pensive. "Do you think a girl should marry a man she instinctively draws away from?"

"That wasn't an instinct. It was just playing hard-to-get, and you know it."

She laughed a little. "We'd better go in before we're caught in some weather."

His hand closed over hers when she reached the door. "Lori . . ."

She turned slowly, reluctant to look at him. Carl was nice—too nice. With curly sandy hair and shrewd gray eyes and a heart that didn't deserve a kickoff into the wild blue yonder of heartache.

"Carl, you don't want me. Not really. I'm not very nice, really."

"You're what I want, nice or not. I'm an adult, darling. I know what I'm getting into."

"No . . ."

"Yes." He drew her close and kissed her again.

But he doesn't, she thought miserably. He thinks I'm a little too hard and maybe I'll flirt a bit and he's ready to handle that when the time comes. But he doesn't know.

She wondered with a detached curiosity what he would do if she told him she had fallen in love with two different men, and that one of them had killed the other in a scandal that had rocked the very foundations of her home town.

"Thinking again," Carl murmured, and gave her an affectionate push. "I give up!"

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They walked slowly across the lawn toward the club house. It was very dark. Lori stumbled once, and Carl's arm slipped around her. For a moment she almost felt that peculiar little thrill that comes from knowing someone wants to take care of you. Almost.

Kenny had taken care of her. No matter how hard he tried, Carl could never come up to Kenny Terrill. Because Lori was an orphan, Kenny's tenderness had created in her heart a special niche that no one else would ever occupy.

When she was sixteen her aunt died. Lori had worked in a boarding house while she finished high school. Then Mr. Terrill had asked her to help in his drugstore fountain, and there had been Kenny—alternately bored and wild and charming and rude. He had bullied her into doing whatever he chose, insulted her when she wept, beat up another boy for trying to kiss her, ended up by kissing her himself . . .

Wonderful, darling, never-to-be-forgotten Kenny, who had died because Griff Erskine willed it.

"YOU KNOW what I think?" Carl murmured meditatively as they neared the club house. The drifting melody of dance music came to them through the somber night. "I think some guy kicked your heart around until you're scared stiff."

Lori's feet stopped, without her knowing why or how. In the pale glow that came from the lighted windows, her face was dead white. Carl smiled at her.

"True?"

"That—It's the most fantastic—"

"I love you Lori, but it's human to be curious. Who was he?"

"I've never been in love in my life." She started walking again rapidly.

"Lying won't make it go away."

"Carl, you are completely absurd!"

"Let's put it this way. I'm a credit investigator. You say you came from a little town called Castle Falls. So I contact the credit bureau there and ask them to send me the dope on a girl who calls herself Lori Brent. Then what happens?"

She ran up the wide steps. "How should I know?"

"You ought to know—if you're Lori Brent."

"The history of my life—Is that what you want? I haven't any history. Ever since my parents were killed when I was eight, I just grew. First with an aunt, then by myself."

"Why did you leave home?"

"Why does anyone leave home?" she asked furiously. "I wanted to see the other side of the hills."

His smile was pacific. "Calm down. Let's go find a tall, cool drink and think it over."

"I don't want a drink."

"Then we'll dance," he said. And they did.

The music was expensive and smooth. Lori liked to dance, especially with Carl. He had a knack of letting his feet take care of the music easily and gracefully, while his arms went about the more important business of making subtle love to her. Her disposition was improved by the time they made the first circle of the ballroom. By the end of the second lap, she was smiling at him.

"I'm sorry."

"You're a vixen," he stated.

"Sounds cute. Exactly what is it?"

He murmured lazily, "A hellcat."

"Are you really going to have me checked?"

"Don't you want me to?"

"Why not? Do let me see the report, won't you? I've always wondered what credit men privately tell each other about their customers. Or do you call them investigatees?"

"You," he said, holding her closer, "are the wiliest, cutest little red herring—"

He said something more, quite a bit of

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it, but that was when Lori stopped listening. Because over his shoulder, she had caught a glimpse of a man that made her heart jump as if someone had stuck a pin in it.

Her glance had been roving. Frantically she hunted the sea of dancing faces. Tall men, fat men, bald men—a tall one of course. Her frightened eyes skipped up a notch, searching for six-footers. Somebody with raven hair and old-penny skin. A man who had a smile on his wide, expressive mouth, who had not been looking her way.

That meant that if she got out of here quickly, Griff Erskine might never see her.

She was trembling, trying not to let Carl know. And that horrible sick feeling was sweeping over her, as it did whenever she thought about Kenny or Griff Erskine.

"Darling," she murmured, hoping her smile was not as ghastly as it felt, "I think I'd like that drink now."

"That's what's so interesting about you," he grinned. "Whimsy."

He took her to the lounge. It was large, softly lighted, half deserted. He found a chair for her near the big fireplace where a log was unhurriedly burning.

"Sit tight," he advised. "I'll be only a moment."

When he came back, she would have an excuse ready—some fascinating alternative to this, perhaps the lure of spending the evening by her own fireside in the cottage up the canyon. He always fell for that, though she offered him precious few chances.

She could hear the rain coming down now, drumming on the window beside her. Reaching out to push the casement ajar so she could smell the freshness of it, she saw that her hand was unmistakably trembling.

GRIFF ERSKINE.

Here, at the Encinal Clubhouse, of all the places in the world. She had left him in Castle Falls two years ago. Bitterly. Hating him, and telling him so to his face. Never wanting to see him again.

When you're rich like Griff, you can take a world cruise or go to New York for the winter or even buy a cattle ranch in Texas to get away from things. But when you're not, you just buy a bus ticket that will take you as far as you can possibly go on ten dollars.

Lori had come to Encinal; and because she used to work in a drug store fountain, it wasn't too hard to get a job working in a café. And there was where Carl had found her.

She did not work in a cafe, now. Carl knew of a real estate man who had wanted a girl to answer phones, and type a little. It was comfortable work, easy, and paid her enough to get along. Nobody asked her important questions. Nobody whispered, "That's Lori Brent . . ."

All her life, people had been whispering that. *Lori Brent, whose parents were killed in an accident, poor kid. Lori Brent . . . her aunt died last week, did you hear? Poor little Lori, the town orphan, who kept putting her heart in hock to the wrong man. Griff Erskine, first . . . She must have been insane to think she could ever get him. Then Kenny Terrill, who had been a problem child for years. It's Lori Brent, you know, the girl who . . .*

CHAPTER TWO

The Loves of Lori

"IT IS LORI BRENT," a man's voice, soft and deep, said nearby.

Lori's blue eyes flared as if she had been hit. She could not look up, and yet she had to.

He was tall, a lean, hard, tough tallness. A mobile mouth that curved, smiling while it tried not to smile.

"You saw me a few moments ago, didn't you? So we might as well be civilized."

She sat there paralyzed, unable to move. After a small eternity, she said, "Hello,

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Griff." And the cool aplomb of it stunned her.

"It's been a long time," he said. "Two years. You're looking wonderful . . . as usual."

She rose, a small, frosty statue in pastels. "Thanks. I hoard compliments for blue days."

"What on earth are you doing in Encinal?"

"I might return the question." Ice dripped from it.

"I've moved here—didn't you know? I bought the Hatton place."

She hadn't known. It was only last month that her boss had reported that the Hatton property had been sold. It was up the Canyon from the cottage which Lori shared with two other girls. He hadn't told her who bought it, and since it was handled through a different firm, Lori hadn't thought to ask.

She said numbly, "You mean you—you're going to be in Encinal?"

"Indefinitely. You still haven't told me why you're here."

There was something around his mouth—She had seen it there only once before in her life. She did not want to remember.

"Don't worry," she said shakenly. "I don't really belong to the country club set. I'm just what I always was—a working girl whose boy friend gives her a fancy fling, once in a while. You won't see much of me."

"Lori, I didn't mean . . ."

"Because," she said blindly, "I'll probably shove off again. It's Castle Falls all over again, Griff. There's no town on earth big enough to hold us both."

His words were even. "Aren't you being slightly melodramatic?"

"Of course. I was born melodramatic. Poor little Lori Brent . . ." She broke it off with a cool smile as Carl came in.

Introducing them, she remembered that Carl worked for the credit bureau. If Griff had bought a house . . .

Maybe he paid cash, she thought desperately. But what about groceries? What about all the simple things involving credit, like car repairs and new shoes and curtains to fit the dining room? It was inescapable that Carl should know something about Griff Erskine. But how much?

She said, "Griff has bought the Hatton place, Carl."

"Oh, yes—up the Canyon. A bit on the luxurious side, I think."

"Griff's the luxurious type, darling. He owns miles of standing timber, mills by the gross, and a fleet of ships guaranteed to fill any port you could name." She smiled up at Griff, her blue eyes dark, clear and cold. "The Erskines own Castle Falls. They control the state. They even tell God what to do."

Griff smiled back at her. "Only on Sunday mornings."

"Very early," she agreed. "Say, one or two o'clock."

It was deliberate and cruel. For it had been around half past one on an early Sunday morning that Kenny had been killed.

Lori murmured, "Carl, it's pouring buckets out. If we don't get home soon, we never will."

"Sure. Glad to have met you, Erskine."

Still, brown, with a faraway deep translucence, she could feel Griff's gaze following her out of the room. Wandering over her, maybe; remembering the times he could have taken her into his arms and kissed her senseless, but never had. Remembering the time when Lori, very young and sweet, had said, "I think I'm falling in love with you Griff." And he had responded tolerantly, "I know you are, honey. But you'll recover."

SHE HAD BEEN SEVENTEEN. There had been that fuss about whether she was going to be able to graduate, because try as she might, she simply couldn't afford the necessary clothes. And her landlady, forthright as she always was,

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had told the Ladies League that if poor Lori Brent was to graduate, the League had better lend her some funds.

Refusing their help, Lori had been furious for weeks afterward. Then a phone call had come for her at the high school, from the manager of the local Erskine mill. He wanted a girl, he said, to do some temporary office work. One week, full time. The money would be more than enough, she realized, to see her through.

It was not until she had been on the job three days that she learned that Griff Erskine, whom she hardly knew, had been behind it.

Angrily she had gone to see him, at the Erskine place up the hill.

"I'm not a charity case," she informed him, her soft mouth defiant and her small body rigid.

Griff laughed at her. "Okay. So you're not a charity case. Look, do you want to graduate or not?"

"Of course I do! But—"

"Then stop being so darned stubborn. What do you care where the money comes from? It's a legitimate job, isn't it? Harris actually does need you. That office is abominably overworked, but he thinks it's more efficient that way. So go along with you."

"It's the same thing," Lori insisted. "It's extra, isn't it? You wouldn't have done it if you hadn't heard stories."

They were in the sedate, expensive Erskine living room. Griff, lanky and brown in slacks, with his hair a dark rumpled sheen, was so fresh out of the Navy he hadn't even tried to settle himself yet. He had been playing tennis when she came. He leaned against the mantle, looking young and healthy and vitally alive.

"Sure, I've heard stories about you. And you've heard stories about me. So what?"

"So I'm still not a charity case," Lori had said rather weakly, looking up into the brown eyes that were playing tricks with her young and happy heart.

"Does that mean," Griff said, rather gently and after a considerable pause, "that I can't buy you a soda down at Terrill's sometime?"

"A soda?" she repeated dazedly. "At Terrill's?"

"Sure. I'd suggest a drink at Ricci's only I don't believe you're old enough not to choke."

She laughed a little, feeling scared and thrilled and quite wonderful. "Maybe I'm not, at that."

HE BOUGHT HER THE SODA, a few days later. And on Saturday night he took her dancing. At Ricci's. He took her to the city one day, where they fed peanuts to the wallabies, held hands in the most marvellous theatre Lori had ever seen, had dinner, very quiet and dignified, at a penthouse dining room that had candles on every table, and music so soft she could almost see the pink clouds.

It was fun. It was glamor. It was romance, in an offhanded sort of way. Griff never tried to make love to her, never had kissed her at all. And she was glad because she was half afraid of that dynamic vitality he had. He was rich, he was spoiled, and if he ever took a notion that he really wanted her, she was sure nothing would stop him.

His family was in a fine stew. Grinning at her lazily one day, he said, "How about that love stuff?"

Her heart turned clear over in an exciting sort of way. "All right—how about it?"

"I'm serious, honey chile. Are you in love with me?"

Her heart was right there in her hand, for him to see. But Griff didn't see it. He saw only a nice little kid with a fragile look but sturdy courage.

"Of course I'm in love with you," she murmured. "You're rich and handsome and people look at us when we walk into

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Ricci's. What more does a girl want?"

"I'm going away, Lori."

It hit her like a sledgehammer. Luckily he had glanced away for a moment. And when he looked back, she had pinned on a smile.

"It sounds sort of permanent, Griff. Is it?"

"Sort of. They think I'm wasting brilliant talents, loafing around. They want me to go into the shipping office, with an eye toward managing it, some day. Of course," he added casually, "what they're really after is getting me away from you."

"I didn't mean to rearrange your life, Griff."

He slipped one arm around her to draw her close. Casually. In a big-brother sort of way.

"You're a sweet baby," he said huskily. "Remind me to come back some day and fall in love with you."

He did not kiss her. But he might as well have. Because he was slated to hand her heartbreak, in one way or another, and what was the difference whether it happened right then or a year later?

It was months after that that she read in a clipping from a city newspaper that a girl named Monica Sweet, of whom Lori had never heard until then, had passed a traditional box of candy at a sorority party to announce her engagement to Griffith Dorn Erskine. The clipping came to her in the mail, and scrawled across the face of it Griff had written:

Wish me luck, baby.

She did, wholeheartedly. Because she knew that Griff had never loved her in the least, and had quite honestly let her know about it. If Lori had fallen, just a little, she was over it quite soon. Because after she graduated she went to work in the fountain in Terrill's drug store, and there she had met Kenny.

Kenny . . .

White and sick, she sat silently beside Carl in the car that moved carefully through the wild rain, trying not to think about Kenny Terrill. When a man is dead, he's dead, and there is nothing you can do about it, ever. You can loathe the man who killed him and you can be appalled at the terrible waste of it. But you can't stop it or change it.

Carl said when they were half way to the little canyon cottage, "So he's from Castle Falls."

She watched the rain stream down the windshield faster than the swipes could carry it off. "You knew that the moment you heard his name."

"Yes. But a credit report doesn't go into his love life."

Her laugh was shortly bitter. "You think I'm in love with Griff Erskine?"

"I think you're in love with someone, Lori. And I'm going to find out who, if I have to wire Castle Falls."

"Why tell me about it? Why not just wire?"

"Because this isn't a gumshoe act. I want to marry you. I'd rather you'd tell me without wiring."

"Maybe," she said tightly, "I consider my past life my own personal affair, Carl."

"Maybe you do." It was steady. "I wish I could. But I don't happen to be that kind of a guy. I like all the facts out in the open."

All the facts! He would never get them by wiring. He might pick up a lot of cheap gossip, a lot of wild rumors that would be half truths and utterly damning.

Lori said shakenly, "Carl, did you ever get an urge to do something wrong? Not because you didn't know better, but just for the excitement of it, just to see if you could get away with it?"

He gave her a swift, sharp glance. "Meaning what?"

"Suppose you walk into a house and there's a fortune in silver on the buffet? Maybe there's a priceless Oriental in the

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living room. Or a genuine Jan Vermeer hanging in the library? And maybe you know a fellow who can dispose of them . . ." Her words trailed thickly.

"Burglary?" he asked. "Just for the hell of it? That's out of my line. Why?"

"Because," she whispered, "that was the man you wanted to know about. That was Kenny Terrill. And I loved him, Carl."

"Kenny Terrill?" he repeated gropingly. She knew he was remembering the way Griff Erskine had looked at her.

"Not Griff, Carl. Oh, maybe a little, when I was awfully young and impressionable. All the girls fell for Griff, just because he was pleasant and had a lot of money. It didn't mean anything. But Kenny . . ."

KENNY WAS RESTLESS and unpredictable. His father wanted him to go to college and learn pharmacy, but Kenny's grades were too poor. His father wanted him to work in the store and learn business management, but Kenny borrowed too leniently from the cash registers and became insolent with the very customers who demanded the most tact.

Kenny liked roadhouses and his glittering convertible. Kenny liked girls and pool and wild Saturday nights. Kenny was a handful . . . until quite suddenly he fell in love with Lori.

He tried. He cut out the pool hall and the other girls and even stopped borrowing money from the tills. He stopped going to roadhouses because Lori did not like them.

"Why bother with me?" Kenny asked her once. "I'm no good, Lori. How no good, I hope you'll never know."

But she did know, suddenly and horribly. On the night that Griff Erskine shot him, she found out what it was that Kenny had been keeping from her.

Kenny was a thief. Not because he needed money, but just for the pure thrill of getting away with it. He could pick pockets or steal a girl's necklace with complete aplomb. He knew how to jimmy open a window silently, how to avoid leaving fingerprints, how to dispose of the loot.

He told her about it, in the thirty minutes between the time Griff Erskine phoned her and the time he died.

"I tried, Lori—baby, I tried . . ."

No one had explained to her how it happened. There hadn't been time. All she knew was that Kenny had broken into the Erskine home, and Griff had shot him.

There wasn't even time to take Kenny to the hospital. The doctor said it was useless, and when she took one look at him, lying in the big fourposter in one of the Erskine bedrooms, Lori knew it was true.

She knelt beside the bed, too scared to cry, too numb to think. "Kenny, I love you. That's all that matters."

"Even now?"

"Forever," she whispered. "I'll never stop. Never, darling . . ."

There was a queer look in his eyes, as if he half thought it was a gag. As if he believed she wanted to rant accusingly at him but did not quite dare. Kenny was used to indignant scenes when things went wrong. And with Kenny things were always going wrong.

He looked far into the dark, stricken blueness of her eyes, hunting for something. And after long moments, he murmured tiredly, "Sure, baby. Forever . . ."

He did not believe her. And she didn't have a chance to make him believe, because it was then that Griff drew her away, gently but inflexibly.

Monica had been waiting in the hall. Monica, sweet, red headed, frightened, disheveled.

"How is he?" And then at Griff's silence she had cried harshly, "Why didn't you call an ambulance? All these people around—the police, that cheap little crook and his girl friend—"

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"Go back to bed, Monica," Griff had said, very quietly. "You're tired and overwrought. And there's nothing you can do."

BRUSHING PAST HER, he took Lori downstairs to the library. And that was where she saw the Jan Vermeer picture, staring at it blindly and wondering if Kenny had meant to take that, too.

She said in a small frozen voice, "He didn't believe me. He thought I must hate him—because everybody hates Kenny . . ."

"Not hate," Griff said. His voice seemed to come to her from a point miles away. "He was on the wrong road, that's all. He couldn't find the way back."

"But he did find it. One slip doesn't count. He found it, only . . ."

Griff said nothing. And after a while things came back into their proper focus. She looked at him and realized that he was Griff Erskine, whose life had been so serene he didn't even know what trouble was. Griff got along with people—his family, his employees, his friends.

He'd had fun with Lori, and then slid out of it with no trouble at all, to fall in love with someone else. There hadn't been trouble there, either. They were going to be married in a week. And if Monica, there for the weekend, objected to having impetuous burglars and town orphans in the house even briefly, Griff would handle that with a suavity that would leave Monica as putty in his hands.

Lori said with a clear, hard scorn, "You're pretty terrific, aren't you, Griff?"

"Look, honey." It was gentle. "I know how you feel—"

"I grant you that being Griff Erskine is pretty much something. Princeton, lieutenant-commander, stuff like that. But since when have you become God, too?"

That stopped him. His face went still. Lori did not heed nor care.

"Your precious silverware must be worth a lot, Griff, to be fair exchange for Kenny's life. Insurance would have taken care of any loss, wouldn't it? But that was not enough. In a split second you set yourself up as a jury and a judge and a firing squad. Erskine, the Great!"

His eyes were a transparent amber, slowly darkening until they seemed almost black. They told her nothing of what he thought or felt as he said evenly, "Take it easy, Lori. You're cracking up."

But she didn't crack up. Not even then or ever. Something congealed inside her and stayed that way. It was still there, shutting her away from Carl, from everyone. She liked people and she was nice to them, but always there was that reticence, that wanting to draw back before any emotions were spilled.

She wasn't spilling any to Carl, now. Her voice had a deathly steadiness as she said, "There'll never be anybody like Kenny again. He bullied me and took care of me and made love to me. I didn't have any family. I guess I was lonely, but I never knew it until Kenny came along."

"Why didn't you marry him?"

"He was killed . . . in an accident. That's why I left Castle Falls. I couldn't stand it there afterward, people being sorry for me, people hinting that maybe I was lucky at that, because Kenny was no good."

CHAPTER THREE

The Man She Loved to Hate

CARL WAS DRIVING slowly and carefully into the slanting rain. When he turned into the driveway, the headlights caught the churning waters that were rushing down the little arroyo that separated the house from the road.

He said, thinking of something else, "This rain, on top of the melting snow in the mountains, is raising the devil. I hope your bridge is solid."

It was. He stopped the car at one end of the long porch, and they dashed through the three feet of driving rain to its shel-

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ter, where they stood for a minute.

Carl brushed the scattered raindrops from Lori's hair. "I won't come in. I don't like that arroyo, Lori. Tell Eileen to test the bridge in the morning before she takes the car over it, will you?"

"Yes." She felt cold and confused. Lost . . . hopelessly lost for a long time, wandering about in lonely circles.

If she married Carl, it would be different. There would be someone to share things with, someone to plan for—

"Carl," she whispered.

He said softly, "Everything I ever said to you still goes. I love you, Lori. I want to marry you. But I don't want an answer tonight. I want it in the clear, cold light of midday, when you've had time to reflect that you're not choosing a pie at the bakery, but a man for life. I'll pick you up for lunch tomorrow."

"All right, Carl."

She watched the taillights move cautiously over the little rustic but sturdy bridge and turn into the highway. She stood there, hearing the rain dance against the roof of the porch and rush through the downspouts. It was a long time before she went into the house.

The telephone began ringing as she closed the door. It was Eileen, who had decided to stay overnight at her grandmother's in town, rather than bother driving through the storm. Chloe was out on a date, but would be in soon, since she was an inveterate early-to-bedder.

Lori was seated at the vanity in the bedroom and had just reached up to unclasp the chain of the fragile locket she wore when she heard the car. Chloe . . . And if she brought in her boy friend for a few minutes, Lori might as well keep the necklace on and do something about a pretty smile.

She did not feel like smiling ever again. And staring back at the mirror, seeing the girl in the fragile blue lace gown that emphasized the haunting loveliness of dark eyes and smooth pale gold hair, she wondered if Kenny Terrill would have liked her now. If he would even have given her a second glance.

The car door slammed. There were footsteps—deep, large-sounding ones, without the staccato accompaniment of Chloe's high heels.

Lori went rigid at the sound of the knocker. It was after midnight, hardly the time for lone male callers. Then she remembered Carl. He must have come back for something.

When she opened the door, Griff Erskine walked in.

LORI STOOD THERE stunned, her dark fringed eyes widening. The living room seemed smaller. With his vital aliveness, Griff could do that to any room he entered.

Raindrops glittered like diamonds scattered over the shoulders of his topcoat. He pushed back his hat to look down at her, his dark eyes luminous as a tantalizing something lingered about his mouth.

"So," he said softly, "no town on earth is big enough for both of us, is it?"

She was paler, knowing it, but unable to stop it. "I'd like to ask you to stay, Griff. But it's late."

"Nicely put. It would be enough to send me out the door in nothing flat, if you weren't Lori Brent. What are you trying to do to yourself?"

"Nothing."

"It's no good, honey," he said gently. "Hatred's a vicious thing. It warps your mind and twists your life—"

She said icily, "Yes, of course. Would you mind leaving, Griff?"

"Lori, do you remember what you were like three years ago? I do. There was a breathless eagerness to you. Everyone mentioned it, the way fate could slam you against a wall and you'd come up fighting mad, but the sweetest, proudest, most wonderful little kid . . ."

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"Let me alone, Griff!" she said furiously.

"All that I can see now," he went on steadily, "is pride gone cold and lonely. I know it's my fault. That's why I'm here."

She turned away from from the searching intensity of his gaze. "What am I supposed to do—forgive and forget?"

"No. Neither. And I'm not going to try to tell you that you're better off without him. Because maybe you're not. Maybe you're the kind of girl who's happiest when she's trying to keep an irresponsible weakling on the straight and narrow."

An irresponsible weakling . . . she wouldn't listen to him. But she could not order him out, because he wouldn't go. Lori turned away from him to look out a rain-swept window into blackness.

Griff said, behind her, "You must realize he couldn't have gotten by with that sort of thing indefinitely. And prison would have been the worst thing that could ever happen to Kenny Terrill. The restrictions would have infuriated him, while the associates taught him the professional angles even his agile brain hadn't dreamed up."

There was a low, shaken anger in her words, "Griff, it's no use. Kenny's dead, and all the fine talk in the world isn't going to change it."

"I'm not trying to change it. But I don't want it to change you, either. You've a life of your own to live. A different one from what you'd planned, maybe. But—"

"Different?" She swung to face him. Her eyes blazed bitterly. "Yes, Griff, it's different. And you made it that way. That's one thing I'll never forgive nor understand. I never trusted Kenny, not for one minute. I loved him like crazy, but I didn't trust him. But you, Griff—I'd have let you take my hand and lead me through flames or flood—anything there was. I trusted you, Griff. And you destroyed the

Please lady, listen

Please don't walk away or turn a deaf ear, gentle lady! There's big news in the air and you may find it just as important in your life as it has proved to millions of other women all over the world — not once, but thirteen times a year.... As you already have guessed, the subject under discussion is a wholly feminine one — monthly sanitary protection.

NO BELTS NO PINS NO PADS NO ODOR

But the "big" news deals with a *very* tiny product indeed, no longer than your little finger! It is called *Tampax* and it is worn internally. This principle is well-known to doctors and it has many advantages. Tampax frees you from the tyranny of belts, pins and external pads. It causes no odor or chafing. Quick to change and easy to dispose of. Tampax is only 1/9 the bulk of older kinds and you can shower, tub or swim without removing it!

Made of pure surgical cotton compressed in dainty patented applicators, Tampax comes in 3 absorbencies—Regular, Super, Junior. Average month's supply slips readily into purse. Compare today's price of Tampax with the price of nationally-advertised external pads. Tampax Incorporated, Palmer, Massachusetts.

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only thing I ever wanted in my life."

He was white. There was nothing to say. Because Lori had said it all. All the love and tears and heartbreak and lonely nights that needn't have been lonely were in her voice.

Griff looked down at her with a terrible stillness on his face.

IT WAS THEN they heard the dull, ripping crash. Lori caught her breath, while Griff was at the door with a deadly swiftness.

"There goes your bridge!"

"It can't be! It was a tree—Griff, a tree fell on the garage . . ."

"Are you kidding?" He caught her hand and they ran, splashing crazily down the wet driveway while the rain beat at them like a bitter enemy.

Griff hauled her back abruptly, his arms catching her waist. The night was black with fury, but she could feel the water swirling around her feet.

"Griff . . ." The words stuck in her throat. "All this water—the arroyo—"

"It's backing up a little, that's all. Your bridge is down, damming it."

She cried, "Stop talking like that! Bridges don't just go away!"

"They do if something rams into them. It's out, Lori. I can see it. One whole end is loose."

She could see it too, a vague bulk in the stygian darkness, lurching at a drunken angle, swaying with the churning waters. Panic hit her.

"It can't be, I tell you! Chloe's out—she can't get home. If she—"

"Take it easy, Lori." His arms were around her. "She'll be all right."

The rain beat at them, soaking her to the skin through the thin lace dress, making a pale, wet tangle of her hair.

"But I'm all alone, can't you realize that?" She was crying, deep, real terrible sobs that were a crazy part of the night. "You can't stay here, Griff . . . You can't! I hate you and you can't stay—You mustn't!"

His arms tightened. His mouth found hers, deliberately, with a tinge of ruthlessness to it. Lori struggled furiously, still crying, but she could not break away. Her fists pummeled his shoulders, but he went on kissing her.

It was urgent, soul-shaking, terrible. The night roared at them and the little creek swelled out of the arroyo to lap at their feet, but Griff did not let her go. And though she fought frantically, she could feel her resistance ebbing as the mad fire of it swept through her with a compulsion she could not check.

She was limp, clinging to him. Her mouth was soft, shakenly responsive. This, then, was what Griff could have done to her a long time ago, but he hadn't bothered.

He picked her up as if she were a doll and carried her into the house.

Setting her on her feet, he said coolly, "There's nothing like a good case of hysterics to clear the air."

Hysterics . . . well, maybe he was right. She felt numb and spent and wanted to walk right into his arms again. It was insane.

CHAPTER FOUR

Forever Lori

HE LEFT HER standing there, to come back a moment later with a thick, white bath towel. Gently he began rubbing her hair.

"You're drowned. The rain gods aren't kidding. Is that a comfortable sofa? The last one I had to sleep on nearly sprained my whole vertebral system."

"Of course it's comfortable." Something caught in her throat, hurting her. "Griff . . ."

"Skip it," he said.

"Did—you marry her?"

"No."

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"Why didn't you?"

"Does it matter?"

"No, I'm just curious—"

His mouth had a curve that was a third ruefulness, a quarter bitterness, and a whole lot of lingering passion. It was beautiful. It was breathtaking.

He gave her hair a final rub, and pulled the towel around her shoulders.

"You'd better get into something dry. You're wet as a mermaid."

"Griff . . ."

He turned from her to toss his wet coat over a chair. His hat landed on top of it. With a careful precision he lighted a cigarette. She waited.

"You're persistent, aren't you, Lori? Maybe it's nothing you want to hear."

"Maybe."

"Right after you left town, some rather nasty stories went abroad. People seemed to think there was nothing I'd stop at, to keep you from marrying Kenny Terrill."

She stood there stupidly, watching him.

"Monica listened to part of the stories. There were some things she knew weren't true. But she let slip a crack once about my guttersnipe sweetheart."

She could not move. But after still moments, she found herself in the bedroom, the door shut, with the lace gown in a sodden heap at her feet.

His guttersnipe sweetheart. It was cruel, but picturesque—something that girls like Monica Sweet might say in their minds, but would never utter save in an unguarded moment. She must have been appalled the instant it was said. And Griff had walked out on her.

She found another towel and rubbed her hair until the ends were fluffy. She put on a white skirt that swept around her in a sunburst of tiny pleats, and a scrap of an evening sweater with a handful of bright sequin flowers at one shoulder.

She thought—So he paid, too. He lost Monica. But when she tried to be glad, nothing within her responded.

Griff had done things, she realized as soon as she went into the living room. He had brought in extra logs, and had a bright fire blazing. He had made coffee, and had borrowed Eileen's silver tray and Chloe's Haviland cups. He had piled stacks of Lori's records on the spindle and had turned them down low.

Lori stopped dead in the doorway, her breath catching and something queer happening to her heart. For the first time since she could remember, it seemed that she was not just a temporary resident in someone else's house. She was home.

"I took some liberties," said Griff, pouring a cup of coffee for her. "I hope you don't mind."

Slowly she came into the room. Watching him. Seeing the lamplight gleam against his ravenwing hair, seeing the expressive flexibility of his mouth . . .

And that was when she knew. It hit her suddenly, with a frightening clarity that was like waking out of a dream in the middle of a black night and listening, wide-eyed, to the sound of a stranger in the house.

For a while she had loved Kenny, yes. But it wasn't so much losing him that had shattered her world, after all. It was the knowledge that Griff could have done such a thing. Griff whom she adored and trusted.

I'm in love with him, she thought, terrified. I've loved him for years, and it's wrecking me. Oh, Griff, how could you?

His gaze lifted to her suddenly, unexpectedly. She stared back, fascinated, wishing she could despise him, knowing that the merest half smile would bring her to him, as it always had.

Lori seated herself on the opposite end of the sofa and took the coffee he handed to her.

She said, as carefully as if she had memorized the words; "You always know the right thing to do, don't you Griff? Like coming here tonight. Because if you hadn't,

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I guess my life would have been entirely different. It would have been rather a mess."

He was watching her silently, waiting for the rest of it. She would not look at him. She dared not. Her gaze fixed itself on the dark pool of coffee in the hand-painted cup.

"You've made me see—that I can't cling to the past. That life is—it's progressive, isn't it? Things keep happening and we keep going ahead all the time."

His cup was still in his hands. Then he set it down. There was something final about it. But he waited.

She whispered, "I'm going to marry Carl Sutherland. You met him tonight. He's—pretty wonderful, and . . . and I've been a fool."

"Lori—"

"He knew there was something wrong," she went on blindly. "He isn't a half-a-loaf sort of person. I lied to him, Griff. Oh, not outright, I just held back a lot of truths. I'm going to tell him everything. All of it."

She hesitated only the smallest instant before she added, huskily, "I love him very much."

"That's good," he said, almost too quietly. "This time, be happy, darling."

"I shall," she whispered.

And it was several moments before she realized that the log on the fire hadn't really flamed up brighter. Only the mist of unshed tears in her eyes made it seem so.

THEY FOUND the next morning that the telephone was out of order. Sometime during the night a branch must have fallen, breaking a wire that was not yet repaired.

"Don't worry about it," Griff advised. "When Monica learns I didn't come back last night, she'll be tearing down here in the nearest available car."

Lori stared at him. "Monica?"

"She was at the club dance last night. Didn't you see her dancing with me?"

"You mean Monica is—She's here in Encinal, with you?"

"With me and my mother and a few others," he said drily.

"But I thought you said—that—"

"That we called off our engagement? Sure. Long ago. But Monica's a good kid most of the time. And she's in love with me."

Lori made coffee. She had fixed a grapefruit, complete with maraschino cherries and a minute under the broiler. She went through the routine like an automatic doll that did not know how to stop.

It didn't make any difference, did it? Not really. If he wanted to marry Monica Sweet, that was his business. Even if he'd turned her down a couple years ago for making the wrong cracks—and a week before the wedding, at that.

He said, over the breakfast, "If you've a rope on the place, I can probably tow the bridge around so it can at least be used for foot travel. When I get home I'll send someone down to fix it for you."

Her chin lifted, almost automatically. "Thanks. But I'm still not a charity case, Griff. I can have it fixed, myself."

"I know you can, darling." He grinned a little. "But I want my car, so I'll send Sandy down."

Darling, he'd said . . . without even knowing he said it. He must have picked up the word from Monica. Trembling a little, Lori put down her cup and went out to find a rope.

They cut down a clothesline wire that was sturdy and almost new. Lori helped him fasten it, triple-twisted, to the rear bumper of his car. The sky was sullen, but at the moment it was not raining. Perhaps it was pure imagination that made her think the creek might have gone down slightly since she first looked at it this morning.

Griff stripped off his coat and tossed it into the car. When he reached for a shoe-

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lace, Lori cried, "What are you going to do?"

"Hook onto the bridge, of course."

"You mean you're going to try wading out there? Griff, that arroyo's narrow, but it's eight feet deep! Look at it, it's—"

He slipped one finger under her chin and tipped her face up.

"You're cute," he told her softly, "And I love you like hell. Now shut up, will you?"

He would have turned away, but her fingers clung to his arms. "Griff!"

He was pale, looking down at her.

She whispered, "You never said that before."

"I never knew it before."

"You came—down here—"

"My mother wanted a place in the south where she could spend the winters. She asked me to find something. I kept thinking, *Lori's in Encinal.* And then when I saw you again . . ."

So that was the reason. She held it close to her heart until Griff said, tiredly, "So what? Another guy's got you loopy again and you're going to marry him."

She stared up at him, a tremor sweeping across her mouth. For a minute she had forgotten. Nothing had changed, really. Carl was still the sensible choice, and Griff had really broken her heart so many times over it would be fantastic idiocy to let him have another chance.

Was it better to love a man who kept hurting you? Or play it safe and not love anybody?

A CLEAR PLEASANT VOICE hailed them from across the arroyo, "Hi you two!"

A man called, "We're the rescue squad!"

It was Carl. Carl, and a slender girl in a custom-tailored slack suit whose immaculate whiteness was breathtaking and completely out of place. On a rescue squad, that is.

Monica Sweet . . .

She stood not fifteen feet away, separated from them by the deep gurgling channel. Carl asked, "What's that on your bumper—wire? I can fasten it onto the bridge from this end."

He walked onto the sagging bridge, cool, calm, as always. Griff tossed the wire over and Carl made it fast. It took only a few moments until Griff, easing the car off slowly, had the bridge towed around where it could serve temporary duty for foot traffic. Only his car and a clothesline wire held it there, but it would do until it could be fixed.

Monica was slim and audacious. "Griff, darling—really! Broken bridges and out-of order telephones! I couldn't believe it."

"You've met Lori Brent, Monica?"

"No, never. But I've always wanted to. Hello, Lori." Her green eyes slanted from Griff to Carl. "You have the nicest boy friends!"

She could have said it very easily, Lori thought. Lightly, amusedly—*your gutter-snipe sweetheart.* Without dreaming she was hitting a place in Griff that was not covered by his usual sense of humor.

"I was simply having hysterics when I realized you hadn't come in last night. Everybody came down to breakfast but you. And there I stood, on my head. I couldn't find any Brent in the phone books and it took me hours of trying, before I remembered what you'd said Carl's name was."

"She phoned me," Carl said easily. "I told her your bridge had probably gone out. When I found your phone was out, too, I picked her up and brought her over here."

"Fine," Griff said. "You can give me a lift home. I'll send Sandy down to fix the bridge so I can get my car off."

"Glad to," Carl murmured.

"I'll just bet," Monica murmured breezily. "But let's not be so hurried about it. Griff's sense of chivalry goes back ten generations. He helps old ladies across the

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streets, feeds stray kittens, and lend money to deserving orphans."

Her bright green gaze slid from Griff to Lori. It was penetrating and a bit mocking.

"Besides, if they had any kissing to do, they'd have done it long since. A few minutes now won't make any difference."

Lori caught her breath sharply.

"Monica," Griff said, with deadly softness.

"I know," she agreed, "I'm behaving like a fishwife."

"We'd better go. I'll send Sandy down—"

Monica's smile was brilliant. "Don't rush me, darling. That off-key wail you hear is me, playing second fiddle. I'm sick of it, sick of hearing Lori, Lori, Lori, ever since the day I met you."

She turned to Lori, her face bitter. "You don't want him, do you? He's no good to any other girl, but you wouldn't wipe your precious little feet on him. And I know why. I called you a guttersnipe once, and that settled me with Griff forever. But as far as I'm concerned, it still holds. You're just a cheap little fair-weather sweetheart, hanging on while the going is good, ducking out at the first sign of trouble."

White and still, Lori had no answer. Dimly she realized that Griff, watching Monica oddly, was taking out a cigarette, obviously with no intention of interupting.

It was Carl who said, tautly, "You had better take her home, Erskine."

Monica ignored him. With a small, tight smile, she asked, "You thought he killed your crooked little boy friend, didn't you? You never stopped to wonder whether Griff was capable of doing a thing like that, did you? You didn't ask a single question. You merely shuddered delicately and left town."

Lori whispered, "Do you know what you are saying?"

"I know, I'm sick of using my heart for Griff's door mat. I never really rated, I came along a year too late. That's why I'm telling you now that Griff didn't kill Kenny Terrill that night. I did!"

There was a terrible silence, broken only by the storm-fed waters of the arroyo.

Lifting her gaze to Griff, Lori saw without asking, that it was true. Something went through her like a shock, leaving a cold, white rage in its wake.

"YOU KILLED KENNY?" she repeated tautly. "You, Monica?"

"I heard him and crept downstairs. I knew where the gun was kept, and fired it blindy. It was dark in there—there was only a hundred-to-one chance. I hadn't the remotest intention of actually hitting him, I only wanted to scare him off. But . . ."

"And you let Griff take the blame?"

"Let him?" Monica laughed shortly. "I couldn't stop him. It was Griff's house. I was only a guest there. That would have made a terrible difference to the police. Besides, people are so—so conventional. It's different when a man does something like that. But when it's a girl, there's always so much wondering, and gossip."

"Yes, I know," Lori agreed in tight fury. "It's all right if they wonder and gossip about someone like me, but for Monica Sweet—Oh, no! She's too aristocratic to be sullied. She has to hide behind her fiancé. If I'm a guttersnipe, Monica where does that leave you?"

"I tell you I couldn't have stopped him! You know Griff! He—"

"I could have stopped him," Lori said. "It's really quite simple. All you had to do was tell everyone the truth."

"I wanted to. I even tried. But Griff—"

Lori's smile stopped her. Quite pleasantly, she said, "Yes, Monica. I understand."

There was a brief stillness.

Then the other girl spun abruptly.

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"Carl, do you mind taking me home? I'll see you later, Griff."

"I'll take you, Monica."

"No." Her chin was high. The green eyes held both pride and misery as they met Griff's. "We're washed up, Griff. What else do you think I've been talking about? I'm going home—and I mean home."

Without a good-bye, she left. The sound of Carl's car was swallowed in the rushing of the waters. He might be back later . . . or he might not. Lori thought he wouldn't.

She said dimly, after a long time, "You might have told me."

He shook his head. "It wouldn't have made any difference at the time. And you haven't been around since."

"Last night—"

"Last night you told me you were in love with Carl. Remember?"

She looked up at him, seeing the whimsical curve of his mouth. Seeing a lot of things she had forgotten were there. Her eyes misted.

"You wouldn't have told me, regardless. The same thing that made you protect her would have made you go on protecting her, whether you love her or not. It's an innate decency, and fineness. . . . ."

He lifted one brow in faint amusement. "All these things—because I didn't, after all, shoot your boy friend?"

"Monica's right." Her words were muffled. "I should have known you couldn't do a thing like that. I'm what she said I was—a cheap, little fairweather babe!"

"Lori." His hands were gentle on her shoulders. "Don't swallow that whole, will you? Because there was no reason why you shouldn't have believed I did it. I told you so, myself, didn't I? I caught you when you'd just had a terrific wham in the heart, and lied. You were too upset to think straight. I said it, and you believed it. Why not?"

"But—but now that I know—"

He grinned a little. "Look, darling. I'm not exactly a child, you know. There's quite a difference between a kiss that's merely intriguing and one that's definitely dangerous."

Her breath caught. "Dangerous?"

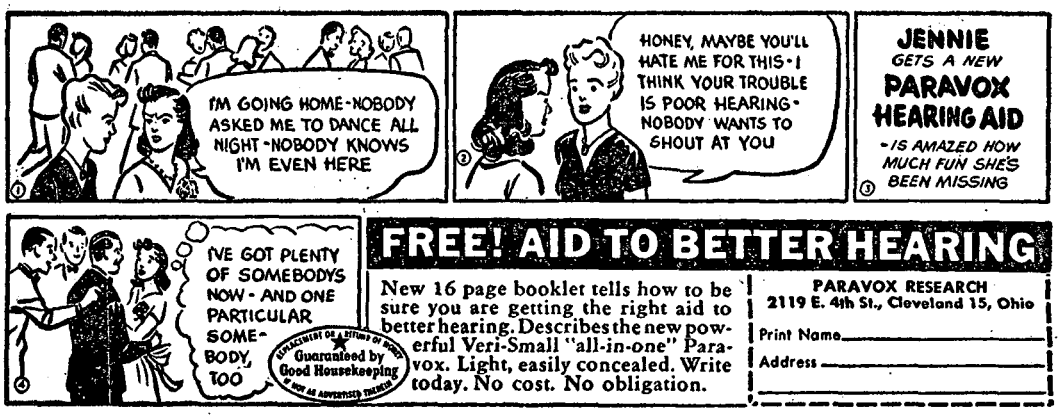
"One gets you a hundred," he said softly, "I can take you away from Carl Sutherland in ten minutes."

"Only ten?" It sounded dazed.

"Make it five," Griff said coolly, his arms slipping around her. Lori's mouth had a soft, shaken look as he came near. Her blue eyes turned luminous. *Make it now*, she thought headily.

But what she whispered to him was, "Darling, I'll take that bet."

Because Griff's persuasion was the sort no girl should miss.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Third Finger, Left Hand

By SHELBY STEGER

THOUGH RIGHT-HANDED, Betsy Benson left-handedly combed her soft brown hair three times before any of the chattering girls in the office dressing room noticed the blaze of her new diamond ring.

"Oh, my gosh!" Dolly, the very blonde file-clerk, squealed at last. "Girls, look at Betsy's ring!"

Allowing her hand to be passed around the circle of girls who immediately surrounded her, Betsy pinned a smug smile on her coral mouth. She was glad it was Dolly who had discovered the diamond. Dolly, whose general conversation was devoted to "And so he said—and then I said," had frequently made it humiliatingly plain that she considered Betsy's lack of suitors an amusing, if not downright abnormal, state of affairs. Dolly might have a date every night in the week, but she wore no engagement ring. This, then, was a moment of rich triumph for Betsy.

"Who is he?" Dolly's shrill little voice broke through the feminine clamor of voices. "What's his name, Betsy?"

"T-Tom," Betsy stammered in breathless confusion. "Tom Rogers." It was, she thought with pride, a nice, strong-sounding name.

Without even asking if she would mind, Steve had taken Betsy to the Beachcomber.

Betsy played at make-believe until Steve made her dreams come true.

"Don't know him." Dolly, the popular, seemed surprised that this should be. "Is he a dreamboat?"

You certainly don't know him, you little snip, Betsy thought waspishly, but she smiled. "Dreamboat? Mmm!" she murmured.

"Nine o'clock," someone announced regretfully, and they all crowded for the door.

"Well, all I've got to say," Dolly remarked with another awed glance at Betsy's ring, "is that still water sure does run deep. I'd never have thought . . ."

Taking a handful of pencils from her desk, Betsy went to the pencil sharpener. To hear Dolly, she thought, as viciously she turned the little crank, it's an absolute miracle for me to get a man. And the candid amazement of the other girls had been just about as bad. Well, it was true that up till now she had never been able to join in the dressing room gossip about dates, romance and kisses; she had just sat back and listened, swallowing Dolly's humorous taunts at her manless state, and thinking her own thoughts. But now . . .

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Waggling her slim finger, Betsy's blue eyes were bemused by the fire and sparkle of the diamond. Yes, a diamond was a definite triumph for any girl, she thought with satisfaction.

As for Tom Rogers—she frowned. Possibly she had been a bit hasty. She'd think about Tom later. She took a shorthand notebook from her desk and entered Steve Marlow's office.

ONCE WITHIN THE DOOR, her triumph fled, replaced by sudden, crashing regret. How could she, in the warm inner glow kindled by the diamond she had worn only since last evening, have forgotten about Steve Marlow?

Steve, whose smooth dark head was bent over the papers before him on his desk, was advertising manager for the machine tool company for which Betsy had worked during the six months she had been in Chicago. He was young, quietly handsome in an unassuming way, with a gently humorous mouth and warm, brown eyes which regarded one with sober shyness. It was that almost boyish bashfulness which had first attracted Betsy; agonizingly shy herself, she had felt a quick sympathy for him. And then, charmed by his diffident kindness, his pleasantly awkward manners, his undeniable good looks, she had—oh, very secretly and hopelessly—fallen in love with him.

Swiftly she turned the ring on her finger until the stone's blaze was quenched in her palm. Outside of the fact that she was a capable stenographer, he didn't know she existed, but . . . *how could she have forgotten Steve Marlow?*

Glancing up from his work, he said "Good mornnig, Miss Benson," in his slow drawl. "I hear you have a lovely new diamond."

Betsy's heart sank. The office grapevine was speedy and efficient, she thought, and turned the ring again.

"Yes," she admitted dolefully.

"Our Miss Benson's gone and got herself engaged," said Dolly gaily, entering and depositing an armful of file letters on Mr. Marlow's desk. "Isn't she a lucky girl?"

"Very lucky indeed," Steve Marlow agreed gravely. "May I wish you every happiness, Miss Benson?"

"Thank you," Betsy murmured most unhappily.

"I could've married half a dozen times," Dolly volunteered lightly. "Only I got to be sure before I give up my career. Men are tricky," she added darkly, and departed with a swish of her long skirts.

"Man, the tricky sex." Mr. Marlow's dark eyes were thoughtful. "Who is your fiancé—or am I being too personal?"

"Tom Rogers," Betsy said briefly. "Did you want me to take dictation now?"

"Later. No, don't go—I've a confession to make." His mouth tilted in a rueful half smile. "As you may have noticed, Miss Benson, I'm a shy sort of guy. I've taken public speaking courses, tried in every way possible to overcome it, but nothing seems to help."

Wondering what this had to do with her, Betsy said sympathetically, "I'm that way too. It's awful."

"Yes and no. It's rather appealing in a girl, I think. It's one reason why I've—admired you ever since you came to work here. As for my own shyness—well, it's prevented my bringing my courage to the point of asking you for a date."

Betsy's large blue eyes threatened to mist. "It—has?"

"Yes. This very day, Miss Benson, I had made up my mind I was going to ask you to have dinner and go to the theater with me. And now—" regretfully he shook his dark head, "Mr. Rogers. I hope you'll offer him my sincere congratulations. I consider him the most fortunate of men."

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Betsy's heart gave a painful shudder. "I'll tell him," she said dully, and turned to the door.

"Just a minute, Miss Benson. If it weren't for Mr. Rogers—would you have accepted my invitation?"

Weakly Betsy leaned against the door for a second. "That's hardly a fair question."

She choked and fled. He liked her. He wanted to date her . . .

How, oh how, could a mere engagement ring have made her forget Steve Marlow?

SUNDAYS, in big blustery Chicago, were very lonely for a girl who didn't know a soul outside of her fellow employees. Sometimes Betsy almost regretted having left her home downstate to go looking for a job . . . and romance. Still, she was forced to admit that she had had no more admirers at home than in Chicago. No matter how pretty you might be—and Betsy knew that she was quite pretty in an unspectacular way—it didn't do a bit of good, if you were too shy to smile and flirt, too shy to say the amusing things that flickered through your mind.

So on Sundays Betsy stayed home in her tiny apartment, did her laundry, her hair and her nails, and listened to the radio. She listened to the radio until she felt she almost knew the various announcers and masters of ceremonies.

Most of them she liked, but there was one she disliked so thoroughly that she never missed his program. He was a repulsively jovial character who conducted a quiz show, *Guess For Gain*. Out of a morbid desire to see whether he was as irritating in person as on the air, she secured tickets for the show. Yesterday she had attended the broadcast.

Once inside the studio, she found that her instinct was correct. He was an oaf. She loathed the emcee on sight, with his superior smirk, his brash assurance that, while all others were dolts, he was indeed a sharp lad. After having filled out a card, which would be put with others from which tonight's contestants would be chosen, she settled back happily to enjoy disliking him in person.

To her horror, she was chosen as a contestant. In a daze, she found herself, scared stiff and shaking, at the microphone with the waggish emcee.

"You are Miss—"

"B-Betsy Benson." Her throat was tight; the studio audience out front, the receiving sets throughout the country—all listening to her.

"Don't be nervous, Betsy," the emcee said with suave professional intimacy. "You're originally from Centerton, I see by your card. And what does your father do there, Betsy?"

"He's a bank teller," she told him nervously.

"Poor but honest, eh? Ha ha ha," the emcee laughed, with that fine flair for insult which is the prime requisite for any radio quiz master.

A clear white flame of rage completely consumed Betsy's nervousness. "As is my whole family," she responded sweetly. "Not a radio announcer in the lot."

A wave of sympathetic laughter swept over the studio audience.

"Ha ha ha. A good one on me," the emcee chuckled emptily. "I see you're a stenographer, Betsy. Comfortable on the boss's knee, hmmm?" He leered, both visually and vocally.

Betsy eyed him distastefully. "Even I could ad lib better than that," she said. "Better stick to your script."

The audience roared again, and Betsy found time to realize that she, the shy and repressed one, was actually saying some of the outrageously tart things which so often occurred to her, and which she never found courage to voice. It was, she decided, rather fun!

The emcee didn't bother to laugh that

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time. "We're a little pressed for time, Miss Benson, so we'll run through these questions."

To his obvious disappointment, Betsy answered them correctly.

"A very smart young lady," he said unenthusiastically. "You have won a beautiful blue-white diamond ring, Miss Benson, master-designed and registered by the LuvLite Diamond Craftsmen, valued at three hundred and fifty dollars. My congratulations. And now our next contestant . . ."

Treading airily, Betsy returned to her chair, not only had she won the really beautiful ring, but she had succeeded in discomforting a quite unpleasant personality. Over a national hookup! This was an unfamiliar, heady joy. Maybe, she thought in delighted wonder, she wasn't going to be shy any more!

She hadn't really intended to pretend she was engaged, Betsy thought as she gazed blindly at her typewriter, but somehow, still inflated with the headiness left over from last night, she had done so. She had invented Tom Rogers, a completely mythical swain, whose name had come to her out of nowhere. It was, of course, rank deceit, but she was so weary of condescension; it had been wonderful, there for a few moments, to bask in the girls' frank envy, to pose, however falsely, as a girl who could get her man.

Unfortunately, she had failed to consider that, in affiancing herself to the nonexistant Tom, she had recklessly destroyed all possibility of capturing Steve Marlow. She loved Steve, true, but it had never occurred to her that he cared for her.

Darn the man, she thought tragically. How was she to know that all this time he'd been sitting there at his desk, all bashful and remote, trying to find the nerve to date her? Why had she had to fall in love with a man as foolishly shy as she? Why wasn't she the type who swept strong men off their feet? Or, better yet, why couldn't Steve have been the kind to sweep her off her feet? Then Tom Rogers could have remained in his nebulous nowhere, she'd be dining with Steve tonight, and she'd be rapturously happy, instead of in the depths of despair.

Should she rush to confess to Steve that she had created Tom from whole cloth, just to go with a radio give-away diamond? No—he'd be appalled by so devious a girl. Nor could she break her "engagement" to Tom; not for months and months, anyway, unless she wished to be labelled as fickle and a heartbreaker. And by then, Steve probably would have crawled back into his shell again . . .

No, there was nothing she could do. She would, she pictured dismally, go to her grave an old maid, still wearing on her withered finger the diamond which was the gift of the LuvLite Diamond Craftsmen and Tom Rogers, the dreamed-up dreamboat.

SOME WEEKS LATER, Betsy dressed herself in a linen dress the color of raspberry sherbet, a large floppy hat of rough straw, with straw sandals to match, and hied her slim pretty self by bus to The Dunes, to attend the annual company picnic.

After greeting various members of the office force, she wended her way to a solitary dune. Seating herself, she clasped her knees and gazed moodily out over the lake. It was a fine bright day; a gentle breeze made the lake sparkle like sapphire and trundled fat fluffy clouds about the brilliant blue sky. It was a day for enjoying oneself, but Betsy knew that as long as she was engaged to Tom Rogers, she could never enjoy herself again.

She was feeling desperately sorry for herself, when a masculine voice made her heart leap and flutter.

"Hi, Miss Benson." It was Steve Marlow, looking extremely handsome in an

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open-throated sport shirt and slacks. "May I join you?"

"Of course." She hoped the sound of breaking waves would hide the pounding of her heart.

"Mr. Rogers couldn't attend the picnic?" Steve asked politely.

"He's in New York on business," Betsy improvised swiftly. "He's a stock broker."

"Hmmm! Money!" Steve looked impressed. "There's to be a potato race in a few minutes; mixed doubles. Do you think Mr. Rogers would object to your being my partner?"

Betsy looked at him; there was a breeze-tossed lock of brown hair over one eye; she longed to reach up and pat it back into place . . . "No," she said decisively. "Tom's very understanding." She reached out a hand and Steve Marlow pulled her to her feet.

They lost the potatoe race, but they won the sack race and came in second in the peanut derby. After that, it seemed only natural that they should achieve a "Steve and Betsy" basis, and that they should eat lunch together; that they should swim together, play softball together and, as the sun's rays lengthened across the sand, laze together on the beach. They talked idly of this and that; Steve was very nice, and not nearly so shy as she had thought him.

Betsy glanced at her watch. "Time for me to be getting a bus."

"I have my car. Might I—"

"Thanks," Betsy accepted promptly. "The buses will be crowded."

Somehow it had become midnight, and they were cruising slowly north, out the Drive. Without even asking whether Tom would mind, Steve had taken Betsy to dinner at the Beachcomber, where they had lingered over tall drinks full of shaved ice, a variety of rums and fruit juices, and topped, rather astonishingly, with a gardenia. The drink had made Betsy a trifle giddy, but not quite so giddy as she had been when, later, they danced to music which was pulsingly intimate, as if played for them alone. It would have been a wonderful evening, she thought dreamily, if it weren't for Tom. Could she have Tom transferred permanently to New York? No, in that case he'd naturally send for her and marry her . . .

At her door, she murmured, "I had a lovely day, Steve."

"I'm glad," Steve replied. "Look—Tom isn't going to like this, but I am . . ." He took her in his arms and, not at all shyly, crushed his mouth to hers. For a few seconds, Betsy merely let pink fireworks take delightful possession of her mind, then her arms crept up around Steve's neck and clung. This was *—oh, this was just as she had imagined it would be . . . sweet, sweet . . .*

In belated horror she remembered Tom. She thrust herself from Steve's embrace.

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"Oh, my!" she gasped. "Oh, my goodness!"

Within her apartment she sat and stared into the darkness, feeling a slow flush of shame creep over her. What a perfectly wicked and shameless girl Steve must think her! A flirt, a cheat, a trifling hussy!

She went to bed and wept with sheer rage and frustration. Steve's kiss—she had dreamed of that kiss. And now, when it came, it had to be this way. She cringed to consider what Steve must think of her.

And Steve himself— He wasn't a very nice sort of man, to go around kissing other men's girls. She cried even harder to think about that.

AT WORK next day Betsy avoided the necessity of meeting Steve's gaze; she did not dare risk seeing what must be there. At five o'clock she was glad to scurry for a bus and home.

She entered her apartment to a ringing telephone.

"Betsy? Steve."

No matter what it is, she bade herself sternly, *tell him No.*

"How about pot roast and potato pancakes at the Red Star?" he asked. "Or schnitzel? I thought it might sort of counteract that gardenia."

"Yes," she breathed helplessly and hung up.

The only reason she had accepted was, of course, that she must explain that she was not whatever kind of girl he thought her. She would convince him that she did not go around kissing men at random, and he himself was not above reproach, under the circumstances, and then—and then . . .

Then what? She didn't know. All she knew was that this dreadful, absurd predicament stemmed from allowing herself to creep forth from her shell of shyness. She had made a consummate mess of things, by merely attending a radio show. From now on, she'd stick to type; she'd be a mouse, a drab little mouse without a man. It would serve her right.

Betsy and Steve ate nobly of German cooking, off wooden tables scrubbed creamy white. Her tongue loosened by excellent imported Pilsener, she found herself defending Tom Rogers against Steve's humorous criticism.

"He is *not* in New York to buy champagne for chorus girls," she said heatedly. "Tom is a sterling character. We've —we've known each other all our lives. Ever since we were children our families have hoped we'd marry. I'm—I'm very fond of Tom," she finished in a crazy, confused loyalty.

"Ahah!" Steve pounced. "Fond of him— But you don't love him."

She sat silent. Tom was beginning to assume a misty reality; he was stocky, with sandy hair; he was rather conceited and he would be good-looking except that his eyes were slightly too close together.

"Take me home," she cried wildly, and Steve obeyed.

"You're marrying him for his money," he told her coldly and departed.

As in a daze, Betsy walked to a mirror and stared long into her own blue eyes. *I wouldn't marry Tom if he were the last man on earth,* she whispered through set lips, and wondered if she could be losing her mind, if this were all a nightmare.

But the diamond was still on her hand, and it winked malevolently up at her.

NEXT MORNING, feeling reasonably sane, Betsy knew what she must do. Rather than confess to Steve that she was a liar, whereupon he'd naturally think she was neurotic, psychopathic and just plain crazy, she would quit her job and never see him again. Further, she would wear the diamond always, to remind herself never to speak above a whisper again.

The office manager was sorry to accept Miss Benson's two weeks' notice. "Your

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work was most satisfactory. Why are you leaving us?"

"I'm—being married. Suddenly."

The girls in the office were in a dither; they asked a hundred excited questions, which Betsy answered dazedly. Yes, she and Tom would live in New York. No, they hadn't decided on a honeymoon spot yet. Yes, she was terribly thrilled. Yes, she'd write . . .

It was awful, trying to play the dewy-eyed, eager bride-to-be, when her heart hung heavy as a stone in her breast.

Every time she looked at Steve, she wanted to fling herself into his arms and confess she was a liar, a girl who made up fiancés out of thin air. No matter what happened to her in the future, Betsy thought direly, nothing could ever be so terrible as this.

In thinking thus, she hadn't bargained for the shower the girls gave her the day before she left the office. They surprised her, at noon, with cake and coffee, and with beautifully wrapped gifts which she opened with icy, shaking fingers. An iced tea set, hosiery, dish towels, a beribboned rolling pin, cologne . . .

Grabbing a dish towel, on which was embroidered "Monday" and a small bear washing clothes, she cried into it. "You shouldn't have," she gulped miserably. The girls had liked her all along; probably their teasing had been friendly, not malicious.

"Don't cry, honey," Dolly comforted her. And when Betsy left, in a flurry of good-byes, Dolly called after her, "Kiss that wonderful Tom of yours for me, Betsy."

Wincing, Betsy hastened home. What now? she wondered despondently.

In navy slacks and a white silk shirt, Betsy was restlessly pacing the floor and considering joining the Army, when the doorbell rang. Opening the door, she found Steve.

"Go away," she begged, but he thrust his way in, in spite of her protest.

"Where can I reach Tom?" he demanded brusquely.

"Why . . ."

"I must talk to him," Steve said agitatedly. "It's the only decent, the only honorable thing to do. I love you, Betsy. I can't let you marry him. I want to marry you."

"Why . . ."

"Don't argue with me," he commanded and took her in his arms in a masterful way. He gazed sternly down at her, his eyes smouldering and dark. "If Tom is still in New York, I'll talk to him on the telephone. If he's here, I'll see him personally. If necessary, I can whip him."

"Oh, no!" Betsy gasped.

"You *do* love me, don't you, darling?"

"Why . . ." If she said yes, Betsy thought in a panic, she'd have to tell him.

"See? You can't deny it," he cried in triumph. "Once Tom understands how it is between us, he'll step out like the gentleman he surely is."

Slowly, helplessly, Betsy dissolved into tears again. Lately all she did was cry, she thought, and allowed her tears to seep into Steve's jacket.

"Your great heart does you credit," he

Love

by Maurice J. Roncayne

Love is when you see a face
Everywhere you look;
In the busy market place,
In a woodland nook.

Love is when you hear him say,
Through the roar of crowds,
Little words that light your way
High among the clouds.

Love is when the dullest sound
Turns into a song,
And in all the world around,
Nothing can go wrong.

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soothed, patting her shoulder. "But a childhood infatuation, a marriage of convenience, arranged by your parents—it mustn't be, dear. Tell me where I can find Tom. I must talk to him, man to man."

Betsy took a deep breath. "There isn't any Tom," she sobbed dolefully, burrowing her head into Steve's shoulder. "I made him up. There isn't any such person and besides, I hate him." She waited fearfully for Steve to thrust her from him and stride out of her life.

He continued to pat her shoulder. "Go on," he coaxed gently. "The ring . . ."

"I won it," she continued. "On a radio give-away show. And I was so lonely, and the girls at the office all thought I was such a d-dope because I never had any dates. And so I just let them think I was engaged. And the story got away from me, and it got worse and worse . . ." Now, she thought—now he'll go away and leave me.

Seeming to feel Steve shaken by some strong emotion, she glanced up to see that he was laughing silently.

"Go on," he said, struggling with this silent laughter.

"That's all," she said angrily and walked across the room, stared out the window at the brick wall opposite. "It's all because I've always been shy. I can think of things to say, but I never can say them."

"You do rather well," Steve remarked mildly.

"You think it's funny, but it isn't. I was lonely," she said listlessly. "You don't know what it is like to be lonely."

"Well, now, I wouldn't say that," Steve said slowly. "Would a guy who wasn't lonely be sitting home on a Sunday night listening to *Guess for Gain* if he weren't lonely?"

Very carefully Betsy counted ten bricks in the opposite wall, then turned. "What did you say?" she asked evenly.

"*Guess for Gain*," he repeated. "The show with the smarty-pants emcee. You know—they give away diamond rings . . ."

"You heard that broadcast?"

He nodded and grinned fondly. "You were sensational. The audience—and I—loved you when you laid that emcee to rest."

"Then you've known all along that Tom Rogers was—"

"Sure. That's why I felt safe in saying I could whip him," he bragged. "Honey, I thought you were cute as a little red wagon the first time you walked into my office. So darned cute, I was afraid to ask you to go out with me. Scared you'd refuse. When I heard you on the air, so funny and sweet and brave, I thought that if you could overcome your shyness, I could, too. I promised myself I'd ask you for a date. When you were suddenly all engaged up with this Tom, I thought it might be a gag. Whatever it was, I had to go along with it."

"How *could* you?" she moaned. "Let me make a fool of myself!"

"Shucks, a man can't tell the girl he loves that he knows she's a darned liar," he exclaimed. "I mean . . ." He grinned and reached in his pocket. "Take that diamond off—buy bubble gum with it or something." He slipped a larger, brighter diamond on the proper finger. "There, now . . ."

Betsy stared at the ring. "Oh, Steve," she whispered, and felt happiness lilt along her veins like a spring brook. She lifted her shining face. "I feel so much better about that shower the girls gave me. Steve, listen: I love you and I love you and I *love you*. So kiss me, right this minute."

"My shy little violet," Steve murmured dotingly, and obeyed.

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Dear Reader:

Every now and then we like to give you what we call a "mature" story, as a change from the usual theme of young-love-ending-in-marriage. By mature, in this case, we mean about a couple who have been married for a while. Knowing that many of you are married, and would enjoy such a story, we prevailed upon Karen Cookson to write AWAKE MY LOVE, which is our lead novelette for next month.

It's the story of Joyce and Bill Chandler, two wonderful people whose love was full of enchantment and magic. For a while they lived in a paradise for two, until somewhere along the line things began to happen. In the first place, Joyce was terrifically impressed by the Chandler name and the family's social position in the wealthy New England town. She spent every waking hour redecorating her house, shopping for expensive clothes and planning parties that were always just a little bit better than those her friends gave. She was Mrs. Bill Chandler, beautiful, wealthy, and sophisticated . . . a social success. Little did she realize that in becoming a social success she had stopped being a perfect wife.

For the girl Bill Chandler had married was a little dark-haired thing who lived in a Greenwich Village studio; a girl who painted for the sheer love of it. When first they had fallen madly in love he had called her his "little gypsy sweetheart." Now he referred to her as a "beautiful, polished work of art." And it took a jolt to stir her out of the smooth, polished pattern she had set. For suddenly there were whispers that rustled through the leaves of the stately elm trees on the big, wide streets, and finally filtered right into Joyce Chandler's ultra-modern living room. People were saying that Bill was seeing too much of Lila Regan . . .

There was only one solution, and we are sure you will agree that Karen Cookson has the perfect answer. Don't miss her fascinating story of two people who almost lost each other but finally recaptured the golden magic of their dreams.

Read it in July NEW LOVE, which has an all-star lineup of your favorites—Jean Johnson, Virginia Nielsen, Nancy Crosby, and others who will contribute to your romantic reading pleasure. It's out June 3rd.

Until then,

Sincerely yours,

Peggy Graves

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"Is that the guy who let you down?" Barry asked.

PAIGE TILFORD was wondering, that gloriously warm spring morning, if she ever would find the courage to write to a man who didn't know her name, who in four years easily could have forgotten her completely, when her young boss arrived at the office looking as if he'd gotten up out of the wrong side of the bed and was mad at the whole world.

Oh, his brick-red hair was licked down just as usual, his dark gray tweeds neatly pressed, shirt and tie immaculate, all as befitted a rising young lawyer who, while still in only his late twenties, was rapidly making a name for himself.

But his blue eyes glinted dangerously,

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The Singing Heart

By CORAL LEE BAXTER

There was a song called "Stardust" which meant a lost romance to Paige, but the stars in her eyes looked at a new-found love.

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tawny brows frowning, the nostrils of his long, straight nose flaring savagely above a normally good humored mouth set now in a thin, severe line. And his square-cut chin stuck out pugnaciously.

"What's the matter," she asked curiously, "get a ticket for speeding on your way downtown?"

He merely grunted and disappeared into his private sanctum.

She began to open the morning's mail, but her mind strayed back again to Nick Marnell. Certainly she couldn't just write him a note reminding him of that night four years ago, down home in Carolina. Because it would be equivalent to saying, "Remember that kiss?"

Yet, could that kiss be the reason why Nick—according to the newspapers—still was unmarried?

Should she dare to hope any longer that in his heart he carried the memory of a dark-haired, dark-eyed girl in pink organdy, who'd fallen in love with him practically at sight, and had let her kiss betray her feelings?

She'd felt so shaken and breathless that she'd forgotten to tell him her name.

And if he'd written the USO asking about her, they would have replied only that they couldn't give out information about junior hostesses. But why hadn't he tried to find her after the war ended?

"Hey, Tilford!" Barry Wakefield barked in the depths of his private sanctum.

"Yep, coming." She picked up the mail, and went in.

He sat hunched forward, elbows on his desk, chin in his hands, red hair all mussed up now, scowling as she put the mail down before him. "With a woman," he demanded, "what will beat a baritone?"

"A—a baritone?" she gasped.

"A baritone, a glorified crooner. But Helena is so nuts about him, that all I've heard since almost the start of the Opera season, is Nick Marnell this, and Nick Marnell that, until last night— Why, what's the matter with you?"

"Nothing," she lied hurriedly.

"Maybe so, but your eyes suddenly looked on the point of popping out of your head! Well, as I was saying, I've watched Helena making a play for him at parties tossed for him, and I know personally of a full half-dozen engagements gone on the rocks just like mine, because of him and his fatal fascination."

"Oh, Barry, no! Helena didn't—"

"You're right, she didn't. I did. Last night when it all wound up in a grand and glorious battle, and I got my ring back. But I also was handed the information that she's the reason why Marnell has hung around town since the Opera season ended, and that she intends to marry him."

"Oh, no!" Paige breathed.

"Oh, yes. And she claimed that now she's no longer wearing my ring, he will promptly propose to her, probably tonight at the Kincaids' house warming. He's invited, of course."

PAIGE'S HEART felt like a pricked balloon. When the papers had said that Nick was staying on in town for a few weeks of relaxation, it had occurred to her of course, but she'd managed to put the idea from her mind, that some woman was involved. Odd that it had turned out to be Barry Wakefield's fiancée, Helena Brooks.

Yet maybe not so odd after all. Helena had visited Barry's office enough so that Paige could fully realize what a beautiful, pale-gold blonde Helena was, possessing gray-green eyes, and the strikingly lovely figure of a professional model. Her father was reputedly a millionaire many times over, president of an oil company, so Helena could display herself to advantage in the most exquisite clothes.

No wonder Nick had remained in Cleveland.

Well, it's been nice hoping these four

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years, Paige thought disconsolately, and with sympathy for Barry. She knew how he felt.

"So you're back in circulation again?" she said dismally.

"Unless I can do something about it. What would you suggest?"

"I've troubles of my own," she countered bitterly.

Barry straightened up in his desk chair. "Man trouble?"

"What else?"

"The guy let you down?"

"Sort of."

He thoughtfully raked long fingers through already sadly mussed, red hair. "Maybe we can help each other. How would you like to attend the Kincaids' housewarming tonight? They expect me to bring Helena, but I can take you instead. I mean, they're not snobs. You'll rate a welcome if you're with me. How about it?"

She would get to meet Nick again, purely by chance. But what good would that do her if Helena Brooks had her beautifully enameled hooks in him.

Paige shook her dark head. "Unh-uh, no, thanks. It wouldn't work. Because if Helena has Tony nailed to the mast, and really wants him, she won't care whom you bring."

"Even so," Barry retorted savagely, "I'd like to show her that I know other people besides her. Got a long dress?"

"Nothing to compare with what Helena will wear."

"Well, for cat's sake, take the rest of the day off and go buy something. Want an advance on your salary, or a loan?"

"I've money in the bank, thank you, but really, Barry, I'd be knee-deep in gilt-edged society."

"Nuts to that. Come along with me tonight, and make like I'm it with you. A secretary is supposed to be gone on her boss, isn't she? Give me a break, and I'll try to help you with your trouble. Be a good sport," he wheedled. "I'm used to you, Paige, and I'd rather take you than anyone else I know. I feel more at my ease with you, and I don't have to be on my guard against romantic ideas."

"Oh, I guess I'm game," she weakened reluctantly. Somehow, she never had been able to refuse Barry anything, not even when he'd had her resentfully running all over downtown doing unnecessary errands for the exalted Helena, and she'd most thoroughly detested the arrogant eyed super-blonde from the very start.

And besides, she thought with a stubborn hope that refused to simply curl up and die—as she freshened her lipstick at the office mirror—how could she ever be sure that Nick didn't remember that kiss unless she got to meet him again, and to talk to him?

She fluffed out the ruffles at the throat

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of her crisp white blouse, and slid into her navy blue suit jacket. She'd saved money for a summer wardrobe anyway, and might as well shoot the works for a really good, long dress.

THE STRAPLESS, ASH-PINK tulle in Darnell's window, was far too expensive, she knew at a glance. But she practically flattened her snub little nose against plate glass, avidly eyeing the tempting lines of the boned, and carelessly draped bodice, tiny waist, and wide, wide skirt. How it would play up her dark hair and eyes. How it would flatter the smooth, clean curves of a rather nice figure.

Oh, Nick, remember? I was in pink that night four years ago!

She spent the afternoon painstakingly shampooing her hair, and doing her nails. The ash-pink tulle had cost, with matching, lofty-heeled, black ribbon-tied sandals, more than she'd planned to spend for a whole new summer outfit, and had left her bank account smack on its face. But she did want to look her very best—in pink—for Nick, didn't she?

Her mind drifted back to that unforgetable night four years ago, when she'd worn pink organdy to the USO. While not the prettiest girl there by far, she was popular with the soldiers because she could sing and accompany herself on the big, six-stringed guitar that her mother had given her on her sixteenth birthday, two years before.

Dark hair brushed until it shimmered, hanging in a curled-under page boy, the big, white-maple guitar slung from her slender shoulders by a black braided silk cord, she was at least ten-deep in a circle of men, singing *Stardust* in her low, throaty contralto, when she first saw Nick Marnell.

He was a tall, wedge-shaped, wirey looking character, black eyed, black haired, with the three chevrons and bar of a staff sergeant on his arm. He was pushing toward her through the men surrounding her. Pulling his rank on them, she thought disgustedly.

A few soldiers, and most of the obviously impatient junior hostesses, were grouped around the jukebox, possessing the kindness to wait for her to finish singing before turning on blaring dance numbers again.

At her side, the staff sergeant began to sing harmony, his low, rich baritone merging with her own voice so very wonderfully, that thrilled shivers washed up and down her spine, and she almost forgot to finger the right chords.

Then she let him take a chorus by himself and he sang to her stringed accompaniment.

She vaguely noticed the girls and soldiers desert the jukebox to join the deep circle of men surrounding her and the staff sergeant.

Black eyes gazing down at her, he seemed to be singing only to her, the haunting wistfulness of his voice bringing a mist of tears to her dark eyes, and an aching longing to her heart.

There had been, when he finished the song, a clamor for, "More, more!" But he'd glanced down at his wrist watch, said hurriedly, that he was sorry, but that he was in town only between trains, and would be considered AWOL in a camp down in Georgia, if he stuck around too long.

She'd violated USO rules by letting him lead her by the hand, outside into the crisp air of a February night. Beneath a polished full moon, a powdering of frost on pines and magnolia and holly trees bright with red berries, sparkled silverly.

Her heart pounded its excited awareness that at last she'd met her first love, the man she would worship all the rest of her life. No power on earth could have kept her out of his arms when he looked down at her in the white moonlight and

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said huskily, longingly, "Please, angel!"

He whispered against her eagerly raised lips, "Why couldn't I have met you sooner this evening? Oh, damn the war!"

They didn't learn each other's names. There simply wasn't time to talk, collect emotion shattered thoughts, after he released her, promised hurriedly, "You'll be seeing me—" And he sprinted off toward the railroad station where a train was whistling.

HE WAS HER FIRST and only love, come to her when she was eighteen. Through four long years of stubbornly hoping and waiting for him to find her again, no other man had interested her in the least. Yet she'd not known his name.

Until during the winter, only a few months ago when she saw his picture on a poster advertising the Opera.

She could barely remember her father. He'd been killed in a traffic accident when she was two. The summer of Forty-five, just a month and a half before V-J Day, her mother married again, and insisted upon having Paige with her in her new home up North in Cleveland. Paige couldn't refuse to go, although she didn't care for her new stepfather, but she vowed to get a job and an apartment of her own just as soon as she could manage it.

Her mother had moved again, to the West Coast this time, when Paige finished business school, obstinately staying in Cleveland so that her staff sergeant wouldn't need to follow her too far, and had been sent to her job with Barry Wakefield.

He'd completed his law study while in Army hospitals after barely surviving wounds received during the early days of the Italian Campaign, and had just hung out his shingle when she became his office girl.

She didn't know much about him except that he'd been born and raised in the coal mining district of Alabama, and hadn't found life too easy.

Long before starting to work for him, she's written every girl she knew at all well down home in Carolina, that when a black-haired, black-eyed man came looking for her, to tell him where she lived now.

The USO, she knew, had closed up after V-J Day.

Then, during the winter just ended, after the Opera came to town, and newspapers printed pictures of the young baritone who'd become famous practically over night, she'd gone almost out of her mind with excitement. He was Nick Marnell, her staff sergeant!

One night each week after that, she'd sat in the balcony at the Auditorium, in the best seat she could afford, heart pounding, an ache in her throat, dark eyes glued to rented opera glasses that brought the distant stage nearer, while Nick's deep, rich baritone held the vast audience spellbound.

Yet she couldn't try to go backstage, or write him a note saying that she was here in town, too, and did he remember that night? It would be about the same as asking, "Remember that kiss?"

And there'd been the late afternoon in January, streets choked with snow still coming down in huge white flakes, when she'd met him almost face to face as she was hurrying toward a trolley stop on her way home from the office. But just as she breathlessly smiled at him, his glance went to a store window, and he passed on by without ever seeing her.

She'd had to conquer an overwhelming urge to run after him, tug at his sleeve, and ask if he remembered a little brunette in pink, with a big, white-maple guitar. Thank goodness, she had not so cheapened herself.

Because tonight, thanks to Barry Wakefield and his insistence that she go with him to a housewarming somewhere, she

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would meet Nick again, and get to talk to him wholly by chance.

BARRY CAME FOR HER promptly at eight, whistling two-toned, when he saw her in the ash-pink tulle, her curls a dark foam about her creamy shoulders. And in dinner clothes, he was looking pretty extra-special himself, she thought appreciatively.

He'd brought her purple orchids. She lifted grateful eyes to him. "Oh, Barry, I've never before had orchids! But," she wailed helplessly, "how do I wear them?"

He showed her the trick of fastening them to her bare shoulder with neatly concealed adhesive tape. And she concluded that it was the breathless anticipation of meeting Nick again, that made her thrill all over from the touch of Barry's fingers against her skin.

Then, as he helped her into the white wool coat that she'd had to make serve as a wrap, he lifted her dark curls free of its collar, and pressed a kiss to the nape of her neck. "I had to," he said sheepishly as her face flamed hotly. "You're so tempting."

"Please don't forget," she countered severely while her pulse raced like mad, "that you're in love with Helena."

Apparently she'd said the wrong thing, because all during the long ride in his smooth convertible out to where the boundary of the Kincaid estate was marked by a high, seemingly endless brick wall on a hill slanting up from Chagrin Valley, Barry spoke only occasionally, and very curtly.

Her excitement mounted steadily as he turned his car in between lofty, wrought-iron gates swung on tall, stone-capped, brick gateposts and flanked by a low, cozy, white-painted gatekeeper's lodge. After four endless years of waiting, she would soon meet Nick again, and get to talk to him!

She was trembling all over as an imposing, big Williamsburg colonial came into sight through the trees in the light of a low-hung, thin slice of a moon, while Barry's convertible smoothly purred up the curving, white-graveled driveway.

A butler admitted them, stone face relaxing into a smile when he saw Barry at her side. A maid ushered her upstairs to a powder room, and took her wrap. Then panic made Paige's finger shake as she freshened her lipstick. She should have had better sense than to come barging into such a home, redolent with wealth, where she would only make a spectacle of herself through unfamiliarity of the niceties of high society, her formal entrance into a thronged drawing room with Barry announced by the imposing butler.

She would self-consciously stumble over her own feet, and Nick wouldn't want to recognize her.

Most people were surging in through the front door as she went downstairs, men in evening clothes, women in sable, and stone marten, and mink, although it was quite warm outside. She felt hopelessly outclassed, even in the ash-pink tulle that frothed so heavenly about her feet. But, Barry waiting for her at the foot of the stairs, lifted blue eyes to her, and suddenly she felt that with him, she could face anything, even a formal entrance into a drawing room crowded with strangers.

The party, he told her, tucking her hand under his arm, was being held in a rumpus room in a far wing of the big house. And, to her relief, they simply strolled in unannounced, no one paying the least bit of attention to them except for three girls in exquisite gowns, a blonde and two brunettes, who deserted their men to cluster around Barry, demanding his attention.

But he shook them off, and guided Paige to a group of people surrounding

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a sandy-haired man, and an alert-looking girl with brown eyes and hair and a lovely figure, a girl no more outstandingly beautiful than herself, Paige thought critically as Barry whispered into her ear that they were the Kincaids.

HE SAID, "This is my secretary, Paige Tilford. And, if you've liked mine, get a load of *her* southern accent. She's from Carolina."

He said, "Honey, this is your host and hostess, Jim and Martha Kincaid. Take my word for it, they're nice people."

Martha said cordially, "Good of you to come, Paige, and if Barry neglects you, let *me* know about it."

Jim said, his hand numbing Paige's fingers, "Get lost right now, Barry. *I'll* look out for Paige."

And as everybody laughed, Paige had the warm, comforting feeling that the Kincaids were no more to be feared than herself. How vastly different they were from Helena Brooks and her arrogant gray eyes and supercillious manner.

Barry said softly into her ear, "I could do with a drink," and the Kincaids were greeting other newly arrived guests as Barry led Paige away.

Somebody, a man, at a grand piano in a far corner of the big room, was beating out a mangled version of *Night And Day*. Barry accepted cocktails from a white-coated servant bearing a tray, and pressed a glass into Paige's hand as her dark eyes roved excitedly from one group of people to another in tense search for Nick.

Then suddenly, she was face to face with him, Helena on his arm. Black eyes looked down at her with a startled expression that set her heart to hammering frantically.

"You!" he breathed. "*You*, after all these years!" Shaking Helena's fingers from his arm, he reached out and tightly gripped both Paige's hands. "Tell me, do you still play the guitar?"

"Now and then," she whispered. Oh, he *did* remember her!

"Aren't you mistaking her for someone else?" Helena asked venemously. "She's merely Barry's office girl."

Nick paid no attention to her, still gazing down into Paige's eyes. "I was held in Occupation for a year. I'd forgotten to ask your name, remember? I couldn't write. Then when I went back to Carolina, the USO was closed. I asked questions. People said that you'd married."

"Oh, that was my mother. If you'd talked to some of the girls—"

"Girls? What girls? I could remember only you."

He wheeled toward Helena. "Forgive me, but after four years, Starr and I have much to say to each other. You and Barry will excuse us, I hope?"

"No!" Helena said frigidly.

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"Yes," Barry snapped curtly, "of course."

The hum of voices in the big room, and the banging on the grand piano, all seemed less loud than the pounding of her heart as Nick led her to a French window opening onto a bricked terrace.

There was no one else out there in the fragrant coolness of the spring night. A thin slice of moon hung low in the sky. Paige raised shy eyes to the tall, so very handsome man at her side. "However did you manage to recognize me so quickly?" she breathed. "And why did you refer to me as Starr?"

He said softly, "For four years I've remembered a dark-haired girl with big, velvety eyes, in a pink dress, a girl whose voice and kiss lived on in my dreams. Through the years I've sung to you, pretending I could hear your guitar accompanying me. How could I help but recognize you at sight?"

He pulled her into his arms. "You were singing *Stardust* that night. Later, when I remembered that I'd not asked your name, I gave you one of my own, Starr, my lovely little Starr."

"It's really Tilford, Paige Tilford," she whispered, "and I've never forgotten you, Nick."

"I heard the name, Tilford, when I went back to Carolina to find you, and people told me you'd married, but to me you always will be Starr."

His arms tightened about her, his dark head bent toward lips she raised longingly for his kiss.

THEN THE enchantment of the moment was rudely shattered by Helena Brooks' voice calling sharply, "Nick, where are you?" And as Paige hastily pushed free of his arms, Helena said, "Oh, I see you."

Her spike heels clicked softly on moist bricks as she swiftly crossed the terrace. And now she was smiling, voice a smooth purr as she slid a small hand beneath Nick's arm, and ignoring Paige, begged prettily, "Darling, everyone is simply clamoring to hear you sing, and you know you promised me that you would."

"So I did," he admitted, "but if I must perform, I'd much rather do it out here."

"But I want to accompany you with the piano," she pouted.

He looked down at Paige. "I suppose it's no use hoping that you have your guitar with you?"

She said regretfully, "It's home, downtown, at my apartment."

"So you'll have to be content with the piano, Nick," Helena purred. She flashed a triumphant glance at Paige. "And you can't expect to monopolize a celebrity quite all evening, you know, Tilford."

Paige followed as Nick permitted himself to be tugged toward the French window and the crowded rumpus room. But his obvious reluctance wasn't lost upon her, and with a warm glow in her heart, she knew that Nick much preferred to remain alone in the moonlight with her.

She slipped aside to an inconspicuous corner of the big room as Helena ushered Nick to the now unused grand piano, and seated herself behind it, strikingly beautiful in her exquisitely draped and shirred black satin. With her pale-gold hair done high on her head, and creamy shoulders, she was a perfect foil for Nick's Latin darkness.

The buzz of conversation hushed expectantly while Helena tentatively fingered a few chords, and Nick consulted her in a whisper. Paige saw him straighten, beckon unobtrusively to someone in the big room, and then leave the piano a few steps to meet Martha Kincaid going toward him. They whispered for a moment, then Martha nodded and hurried away.

Nick, an elbow on the piano, began to sing a melody unfamiliar to Paige, and she was noticing critically that Helena

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could furnish a perfect accompaniment, when Barry's voice said suddenly at her side in a quiet undertone, "Is he the guy who let you down?"

Paige whirled, startled. "Oh, you mean what I said at the office this morning? No, Nick hasn't let me down. It was only a misunderstanding on his part. He thought I'd married."

Barry shrugged. "And like the rest of the women, you're a pushover for that glorified crooner."

"Well, if it's making you jealous," she flared, "why don't *you* learn to sing?"

"I'd as soon jump off a bridge."

It was her turn to shrug. "Suit yourself. It's none of my affair." She impatiently turned away from him to listen to Nick's deep, rich baritone, resentfully eyeing Helena who smiled up across the piano at him as if she owned him.

There was a movement in the back of the room as he finished the song and nodded his appreciation of the applause. Then Martha Kincaid went toward him, carrying a guitar complete with shoulder cord.

As Paige gasped and involuntarily ducked behind Barry's broad shoulders, she heard Nick thanking Martha. Then he lifted a hand. "Tonight," he announced, "I'd like to share a very special number with a very charming young friend of mine." He looked around questioningly. "If Sta— Paige Tilford will be so kind?"

Oh, not Stardust. That's our song, just yours and mine forever!

Barry stepped aside and gave her a push forward. "Go on, it's you he wants."

WITH ALL EYES turning toward her, she had no choice but to walk toward Nick and the piano where Helena sat with suddenly tight lips.

Martha slid the black, braided, shoulder cord over Paige's dark head. "I don't know how good this guitar is," she whispered. "It belongs to our chauffeur."

Knees shaking, battling stage fright such as she'd never felt at the USO, Paige fingered an E on the piano, and liked the deep, full tones of the chauffeur's instrument as she pulled it into tune. Helena's gray-green eyes were icey hard with suppressed fury as Nick said gently, "Please, Helena, this time no piano."

His black eyes turned to Paige. "Of course you know *To Each His Own?* in E-flat. I'll take the verse, then you sing the melody in the chorus. Give me a few measures of introduction."

He faced her, his side to the big room, and as he looked down into her eyes, he seemed to be singing only to her as on that faraway night four years gone, while the deep organ tones of the guitar softly blended with his golden baritone.

Her eyes closed and she heard her own husky contralto pick up the melody at the beginning of the chorus, while his voice changing to harmony, merged with hers as wonderfully as on that other night. Prickly shivers fled up and down her spine, and she almost forgot to finger the proper chords.

For long moments after they'd finished, there was only a hushed silence in the big room, then a storm of applause roared out.

Helena, she noticed as Nick smilingly but firmly refused to encore, had disappeared from behind the piano.

A hand touched her arm. Barry said gruffly, "You came with me and I'm taking you home. Let's get out of here, right now."

She nodded obediently remembering that she really was his guest, but as Nick reached out and caught her arm asking where he could find her she paused to give him the address of her small apartment.

Helena Brooks, gray-green eyes flaming furiously, mouth a thin, hard slash of crimson, was pacing the powder room, whirling as Paige entered. "Look," she

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blazed savagely, "leave Nick Marnell alone if you know when you're well off. Because if you don't, I'll find a way to get you into more trouble than you've ever dreamed of. He's mine, and I intend to marry him. Cut in on him again, and you'll wish you hadn't, even if I have to use my two hands on you. Don't just stand there looking at me. Try to understand what I'm telling you. Keep away from Nick Marnell, or you'll be sorry, very sorry!"

And the stark, naked hate in her eyes as she jerked open the door to the hallway, told Paige that she'd meant every word she'd said.

Paige shrugged, found her coat, and went back downstairs. Barry hurried her out of the house so fast that she didn't have a chance to see Nick again, nor even to find the Kincaids to say goodnight.

"Well," he growled as his car smoothly rolled down the long, circling, white graveled driveway, "you might have told me this morning at the office, that it was Marnell you're in love with. I might have known it, though, with practically every other female in town losing her head over him."

"The difference is," she flared resentfully, "that I met Nick and fell in love with him long before he became a famous opera singer. But I'm sorry," she said contritely, suddenly remembering Barry's purpose in taking her to the Kincaid's, "that I let you down. Barry, I couldn't pretend to be in love with you, as long as Nick was there."

He swung his car out between tall brick gateposts onto the road. The sickle moon was gone now, but a canopy of stars hung over the hills shouldering up tall and dark from the valley. "What I can't understand," he grumbled, "is why you can't recognize Marnell for what he really is, a plain, everyday wolf with a Grand Opera howl."

"Nick is *not* a wolf," Paige bristled. She wanted to add sharply, but managed not to, "And your precious Helena isn't an angel exactly."

Barry shrugged and lapsed into a grim silence that lasted all the way into town, and to the door of her apartment. Then she couldn't resist the urge to say nastily, "Anyway, I *told* you that Helena wouldn't care whom you dragged out there tonight."

"And one of these day you'll remember that I warned you about Marnell," Barry retorted savagely.

Paige got out of the car by herself. "You're just saying that," she blazed, "because you're gone on Helena but she's crazy about Nick. Only I fell in love with Nick long before he made a name for himself, and he's in love with me. That's the score, and you and Helena will just have to take it and like it."

YET AS SHE carefully put her expensive ash-pink tulle on a hanger, she felt sorry for Barry. She'd known what it was like to be sick with longing for someone who didn't seem to care.

And if Nick had not been there at the Kincaid's, it wouldn't have been too hard to pretend just a tiny bit of love for Barry. Because she still could remember the look in his blue eyes as she'd descended the stairs at the beginning of the evening, and how she'd felt that with him at her side she could face anything. And she'd never been able to refuse him, even when he'd asked her to run errands all over downtown for Helena. No, but for Nick, it wouldn't be hard to fall in love with Barry.

Only she had at last met Nick again, and he had remembered her, and except for Helena, she would have had another of Nick's kisses. So Helena's threats wouldn't keep her away from Nick, Paige thought defiantly as she bound up her dark hair in a towel and began to cream

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her face. Furthermore, whether Helena liked it or not, she would marry Nick whenever he asked her to. She'd had four years in which to make up her mind, and—

Her startled glance went to the bedside clock as her doorbell rang unexpectedly. But of course, Barry had brought her home so very early that it still lacked minutes of being midnight. Perhaps he'd regretted his gruffness and wanted to apologize.

But it was Nick's voice that asked over the small phone from the outside vestibule downstairs, "Starr, honey, may I come up?"

"Of course!" She pushed the button releasing the lower floor latch for him, pulled her own door ajar, and with frantically pounding heart, flew to the bedroom to mop the cream from her face. She jerked the towel off, letting her dark curls tumble down around her shoulders, lipsticked with shaking, excited fingers, and was zipping up a long skirted, gaily printed housecoat, when she heard his tap at her door.

Perhaps it was only her imagination, or because through four long years she'd so magnified the rapture of his kiss in her dreams, that now it failed to meet expectations. But wasn't he her Nick, and wouldn't he always be her Nick?

She led him into her tiny living room, took his hat and topcoat, and waved him to the sofa where she could snuggle up to him. "But how did you ever manage to escape Helena?" she asked curiously.

He looked up from the sofa with his intensely black eyes, and said, "Oh, I merely informed her that I preferred to be with you."

Paige sank down at his side and fitted herself into the curve of his arm. "And I was so afraid that you'd forgotten all about me."

His hand rested on her knee. "Starr, baby," he said huskily, "how would you like to travel with me? I make ample money for both of us. The Opera is ended until next winter, but meanwhile I have a concert tour, and I've agreed to go to Hollywood for a picture. I'd thought to ask Helena to accompany me, but I'd much rather have you, with your guitar. For four years I've thought of only you—"

"Oh, Nick," she burst out excitedly, "I'd love it! How soon do we start? I've got to have time to write Mother to fly East if I'm to be married, and—"

"Married?" Nick frowned. "Who mentioned that? Baby, I can't afford to marry. It would detract from my romantic appeal if it became known that I possessed a wife. But I am offering you travel, a good salary, all the pretty clothes you want, and love—"

"Love?" Paige jerked free of his grasp, and was on her feet, staring down wide-eyed at him. "You call that love? Well, I don't."

"But Starr, baby, can't you see? If I'd wanted to marry, I could have had Helena, or any other of many very lovely people."

"Yes, I begin to see," she flashed indignantly. "And all the time I thought you fine and noble and good, but you're just a common wolf after all! Don't talk to me of love. Just take your hat and coat and get out of here as quick as you can!"

THE DOOR SECURELY locked behind his reluctant departure, she threw herself down across her bed and sobbed out the bitter hurt of ugly disillusionment, and of having the dreams of four long years ruthlessly blasted in a matter of minutes.

At the office next morning, Barry was glum, cross, and snappy, and he settled down to work as if by that means he could put all thought of Helena from his mind.

Paige felt an almost overwhelming urge to take his red head against her heart, and

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to run comforting fingers through his crisp, touseled hair. She longed to assure him that things sometimes were not as bad as they seemed.

But she took his dictation and retired to her typewriter quite coolly and aloofly. Because she had no desire to become involved in explanations and the humiliating confession that he'd been right about Nick. Nick, a plain everyday wolf with a golden, baritone howl.

Sooner or later, Helena Brooks would find it out, too, or at least realize that Nick's plans didn't include marriage. Then maybe she would appreciate the true value of Barry Wakefield's love.

But, Paige thought longingly while she typed automatically, she herself could do with a little love like Barry's.

Because now she was right back where she'd been at eighteen, except a little wiser. Then—she knew now after a night of tears and asking herself soul-searching questions—she'd had only a few brief crushes and was heart hungry for love.

And that night at the USO when she'd met Nick, the magic of his golden voice, and the pleading eloquence of black eyes mutely telling her things she longed to hear, had filled her with a spiritual exaltation that—climaxed by his kiss—she'd mistaken for love.

But it wasn't love, she knew now, that she'd cherished in her heart through four long years. She felt let down, but not crushed. Her whole world wasn't shattered, nor her belief in the reality of dreams coming true. Which put her right back again where she'd been four years ago, achingly hungry for real love.

Like Barry's for Helena.

Oh, she'd gotten to know Barry well enough while working for him, so that she couldn't be fooled about him. Barry was nice, sweet, good, and just too darned fine to be wasting his time torching for a spoiled, hard-as-nails, self-centered brat like Helena Brooks!

But he still was in love, terribly in love, Paige knew as the days passed and he grimly acted as if in the whole wide world, there existed nothing but work and more work, and Helena no longer visited his office.

Of course since he and Helena broke up, Paige couldn't ever forget, he'd occasionally tried to date her. And if her refusals had sounded unduly curt and firm, it was because she'd never before been able to refuse him anything.

She'd not dared accept his invitations simply because she knew the limit of her own strength, and merely the temptation to go out with him was almost more than she could resist.

So she'd had to refuse him because if while on a date, he ever—in his bitter loneliness—took her into his arms and kissed her, nothing could save her from betraying her love for him. And she didn't want him on the rebound. For her there never could be any happiness with him so long as his heart ached for Helena.

And if, with his arms about her, his kiss sapping her strength, he asked her to marry him, she would lack the power to refuse. Just as she had lacked the ability to resign her job and get away from the torment of working with him.

Day after day the newspapers carried items of Helena Brooks' presence at various high society functions, always escorted by the famous singer, Nick Marnell, who had apparently, given up his summer concert tour to remain in town with her.

Paige could smile now at the thought of Helena's wild threats. She no longer had anything to fear on that score, but Barry worried her terribly as he grew thinner and more tired looking and worked far too hard. Of course he was winning cases right and left, building up a wonderful reputation for himself as a lawyer, but—

"Look," she burst out one morning, un-

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able to contain herself further, "why don't you hand Nick Marnell a little competition with Helena instead of slowly killing yourself with overwork?"

He gave her a long, level look from his dark-shadowed, blue eyes. "Hasn't it ever occurred to you," he asked, "that I might not want a woman in love with someone else?"

"But you do love Helena."

"I thought I did," he corrected her, "until that night at the Kincaids', but since then I've really gone off the deep end about someone else. So I know now that I was badly mistaken about my feelings for Helena."

"And this—this girl you care for now, really do, I mean," Paige asked hesitantly, "is gone over some other man?"

"She definitely shows no interest in me."

"I'm sorry, Barry, truly I am," she whispered, feeling again as so often in the past weeks, the almost overpowering desire to take his red head against her and to comfort him.

"Why don't you give Helena a little competition with Nick?" he demanded. "I'm still willing to help you in any way possible."

She managed a grateful smile. "Thanks, but I don't run after men." Even yet her pride kept her from confessing to Barry how very right he'd been in his appraisal of Nick's true character.

Then one morning a few days later as she waited impatiently for Barry to begin dictation, he grimly pushed a folded newspaper across his desk toward her. "Look at that." He stabbed a finger down at a front page item. "It appears that our friend was no wolf after all."

She'd not yet seen any paper that morning, so the news came as a complete surprise, but failed to affect her in the least.

The caption in 18-point type was:

OPERA SINGER AND HEIRESS SPEAK VOWS AT SURPRISE WEDDING

Paige pushed the paper back toward Barry without bothering to read the rest of the story. "Or," she said in reply to his comment, "Helena had the money to bait a trap."

Then, to her horror, she burst into tears.

"What's the matter with you?" Barry demanded sharply. "Still in love with that guy?"

"Oh, nothing's the matter, nothing at all!" she wailed, fleeing to the refuge of the rest room.

Helena's marriage hadn't changed anything, because Barry was in love with somebody else who didn't care a single hoot about him!

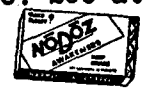
He was pacing the office when she

(Continued on page 93)

Will You Try a 25c Box of NoDoz Awakeners at My Expense?

If you have trouble keeping awake when you have to, try a NoDoz Awakener*—America's famous wake-up tablet since 1933. 25c at all drug stores.

*(T. M. Reg)



They're harmless as coffee! Send me 10c to cover handling and I'll mail you a full 25c package by return mail.

Hugh Harrison

Harrison Products Inc. Dept. PG2. 45 Second Street, San Francisco.

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Your Pen Personality

By Mary Frances

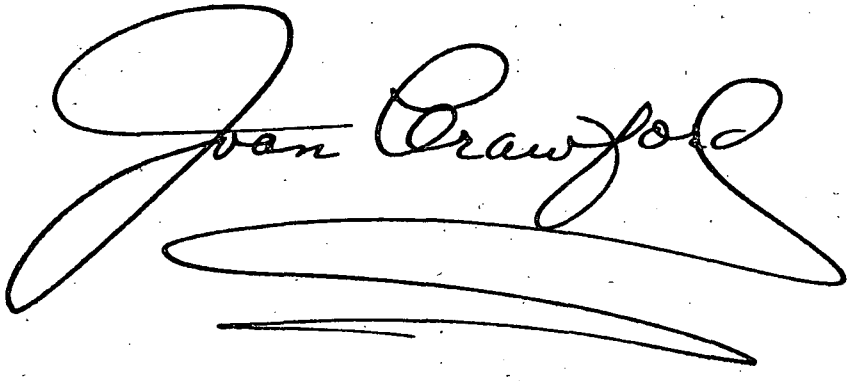
Here is a special and exciting feature, written exclusively for our NEW LOVE readers, by the famous Mary Frances, who will send you a personal analysis of your handwriting. Why not take advantage of this offer today? Simply write to her in care of NEW LOVE MAGAZINE, 205 East 42nd Street, New York 17, N. Y. Send a self-addressed envelope with ten cents, and clip the coupon on the opposite page.

WHAT IS THE FIRST THING you notice when you look at Joan Crawford's signature? One man said the "movement" which is so noticeable, yet he admitted it was something he couldn't put his finger on. Another said the "interesting underscore," and a third said the "tremendously large capitals."

These three were non-analysts, yet they all picked the outstanding traits. Let's study our own writing, which, after all, is a good basis of comparison. The "movement" you can see yourself in the sweeping letter formations, the rhythm, the action. That tells us that Joan Crawford has a tremendous vitality, love of action, and horror of being too quiet too long. Movement is essential to her happiness.

The "interesting underscore" accentuates the above with relation to her personality. She loves contact with people and thrives when others are around. Probably the cruelest punishment Joan's mother could have given her, as a child, was to isolate her from her playmates. The "tremendously large capitals" our third friend noticed reveal a love of color, of beauty, of seeing things well done.

All in all we know that Joan Crawford is an extrovert, a lively individual, a tremendously vital person.



Now let's look at other signs in the writing. The way her signature creeps up the side of the paper tells that she is active, optimistic, usually cheerful. The open "a" and "o" speak of her generosity and willingness to share. And the occasional disconnected strokes reveal some intuition. Usually she relies on logic, but occasionally intuition takes over.

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This is the signature of a Brooklyn girl who worked hard. She was a "hoofer" in the chorus of a vaudeville circuit. She made enough money to work her way across the country, and that was all. Nothing at the end of the year to show for her incessant driving—except more experience. Many a girl would have called it quits but Lucille Le Seur, as she was then known, kept at it until a so-called "break" came, a chance to go into the movies.

A casual reader of Joan's life might think that it was "luck" from then on, that she really didn't earn her reputation. But those who watched her climb through the years know that it took all the grit, all the determination, and ambition one could muster up.

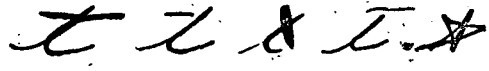
Did I say she was generous? She has adopted four children from orphanages. She knows how tough it is to be poor and likes to help those less fortunate than she.

Did I say she liked action? After twenty years of hard work she is back at making another picture, even though she's wealthy enough to retire.

Did I say she is "vital?" She is still the favorite among those who want their companions young and interesting!

How It's Done

Budding graphologists, and those just interested in checking illustrations against their friend's signatures, may add this to their list of "how it's done."



The lowly little t-crossing which you may have considered just another nuisance is a test of your will power. That line tells the trained eye how much will power is present, if there is a will, and how determined an individual can be.

The longer the t-crossing the more determined the person. The first illustration is a perfect example of the chap who says "I'll do it first."

The second t-crossing, short and weak, doesn't even cross the letter, is found in the handwriting of those who put off doing disliked tasks. If you put off crossing a little thing like a letter, the chances are you'll put off doing more important chores.

The third t-crossing, slashed downward, looks a little vicious doesn't it? That's the analysis too. It was originally written by a chap who thought nothing of knocking others down, hurting those smaller than himself.

Do you have anyone who uses the fourth illustration? High, light, rather weak? This individual doesn't have enough "git" to "git" herself a man, a job, or anything else. She accepts what may come her way, but won't assert herself.

The fifth, and last, illustration was taken from the writing of one who is quite determined, yet sensitive, who made sure he finished what he started out to do.

H. H. Handwriting is supposed to vary

(Continued on page 96)

Send this coupon and a sample of handwriting with 10c and a stamped, self-addressed envelope to:

Mary Frances, c/o New Love Magazine **June, 1949**

205 East 42nd Street

New York 17, N. Y.

NAME.....

STREET ADDRESS.....

CITY..... **STATE**.....

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Leon thrilled her as Johnny never could.

AS THE TAXI jerked to a stop before the stage door of the New York Opera House, Claire Vinson was out of it like a flash of lightning. "Thanks for the dinner, Johnny," she called to the young man she'd left in the cab.

"Hey! Wait a minute!" Johnny called. "When do I see you again?"

"I don't know. We're awfully busy on the new ballet," she called as she ran up the three iron steps that lead to the stage door. "We're trying it out next week in

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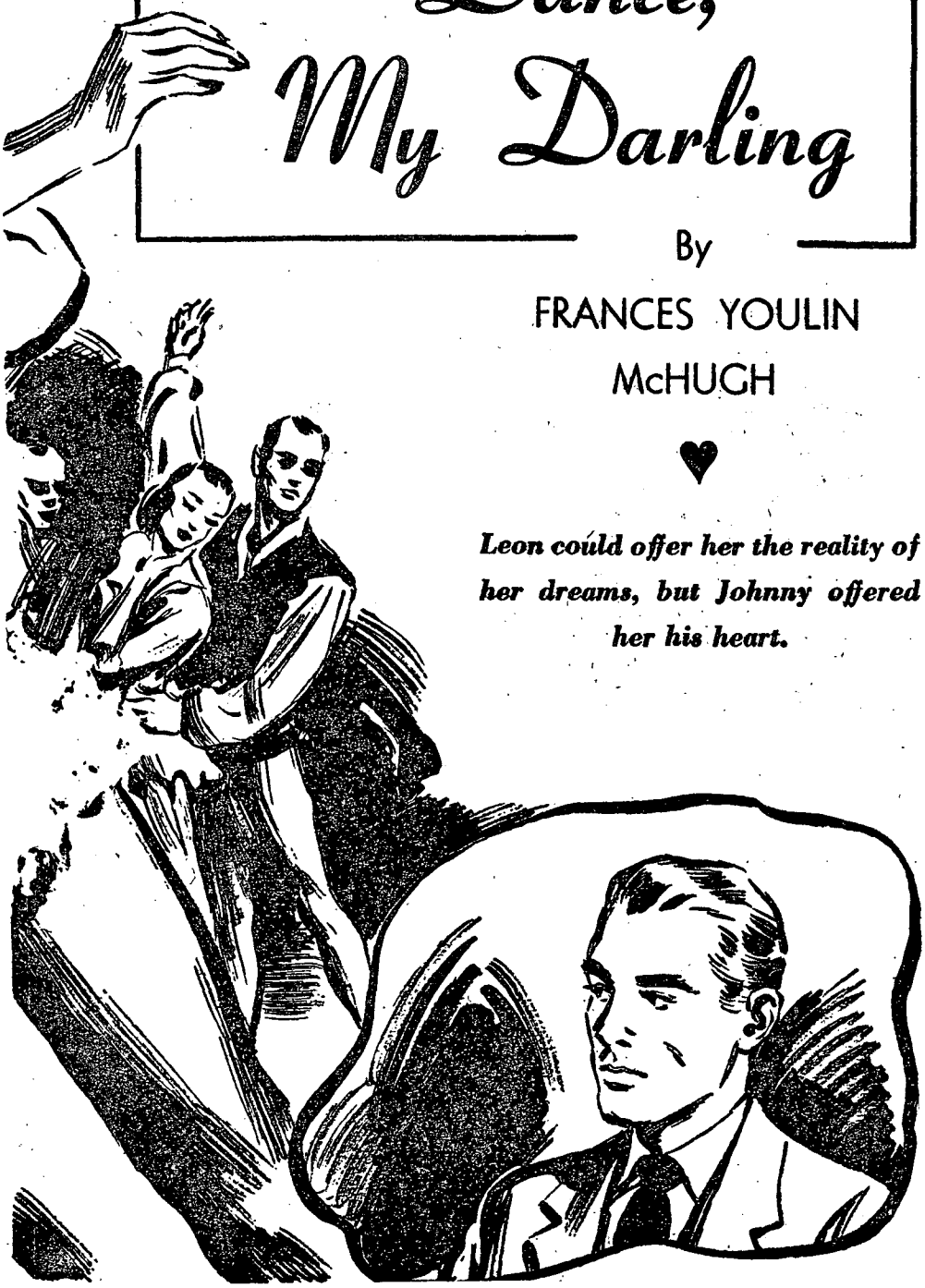
Dance, My Darling

By

FRANCES YOULIN McHUGH



Leon could offer her the reality of her dreams, but Johnny offered her his heart.

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Philly, so the rehearsals are important."

Without looking she knew just what kind of an expression he had on his face; kind of as if he'd lost something and didn't know what to do about it.

Leon Nicholi, the premier danceur was already limbering up as she hurried back stage and over to the spiral iron stairway which led up to the dressing rooms.

"Aren't you a bit late?" he asked, finishing a *pirrouette* as only he could do one, and stopping in front of her so she had to bring herself up short to avoid bumping into him.

"Yes, I am late," she admitted breathlessly.

Vera Samaroff, the ballerina, strolled out of her dressing room, beautiful with a firey beauty that seemed to burn brighter when her dark eyes met the equally dark ones of Leon. "Hello darling," she said.

Quickly Claire murmured, "Excuse me, I must hurry." She was always embarrassed when Vera found her talking to Leon.

Upstairs in the long dressing room, buzzing with feminine voices, she ripped off her suit and got into her first costume.

"Get a good meal?" Ada Revnik called out.

"Swell. Steak."

"Um. I had a hot dog. What for dessert?"

"I didn't wait. I was late anyway. Johnny talks so much and slows up everything."

Ada sighed. "Gee, why don't you give that guy a break? He's so handsome. Personally I always go for that tall, handsome blond type."

"Oh hush!" Claire said, she was glad the on-stage bell sounded.

SHE HAD A SMALL SOLO in the first ballet and a few turns with Leon. Just before they separated his lips touched her cheek. It was like a spark that ignites a fuse which might never have reached the explosive without it, quick and light.

Instantly Vera whirled into Leon's arms, almost knocking Claire over. There was venom in her quick glance.

"You'll get heck for that," Ada murmured through her smile, as Claire took her place in the chorus group.

Claire said, "Um," shivering a little.

Then from the second row of the orchestra a familiar face began to grin at her and her throbbing heart gave a jerk. Johnny! Darn him! Why didn't he go home and do his lessons like a good little V. A.? Now he would be waiting at the stage door for her and pester her to have a nightcap with him, and she knew he couldn't afford to keep spending money on her. Also he'd probably have something to say about that kiss of Leon's.

All during the show he kept trying to attract her attention until Leon noticed it and as the last curtain fell he made the opportunity to say, "Perhaps if you did not have so many outside interests, Claire, you would dance better."

It was such an unexpected and unfair criticism that for a moment quick tears made him seem to be wavering before her eyes.

She couldn't answer him because Vera came over and slipped her arm around his. "Hurry, darling," she said. "I have a new maid and she'll be cross if we're late for supper."

When Claire reached the dressing room, the last girl to go up the stairs, Ada asked, "What did he say to you?"

"Who?"

"Oh, for heaven sakes! You know very well who I mean."

Claire began wiping off her makeup. "He said, 'Perhaps if you did not have so many outside interests, Claire, you would dance better.' "

Ada threw her powder puff at the mirror. "Why the—!"

"Oh, it doesn't matter," Claire said, not too truthfully. She got into her street

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clothes, said an almost inaudible, "Good night," and left the chattering group as quickly as possible.

JOHNNY was at the stage door, just as she'd known he would be.

"*My* little wonder girl," he said. "The first one out tonight."

"Please, Johnny," she pleaded, "stop thinking of me as your *any* kind of girl. And you got me into trouble acting like such a goon during the show."

"Aw gee! I'm sorry." He hugged her arm close to him as they walked along the crowded street. "Did somebody bawl you out?"

She nodded. "Leon."

"Oh! *That* one."

She gently disengaged her arm from his grasp. "And you needn't speak of him in such a disparaging tone. He's one of the best dancers in the whole world."

"And the biggest heel!"

She stopped walking and looked up at him. "You don't know *anything* about him!"

His smile was rueful. "I know he's playing on you like a harp—you little dope! Can't you see he's just deviling you? One minute he encourages you and makes you think some day you'll be doing Vera Samaroff's parts, and the next minute he tears you to pieces and tells you how awful you are. What did he say tonight?"

She lowered her glance, slowed her steps. "He said . . ." She repeated Leon's words.

"Hum. So he's jealous?" Johnny said. "That's worse than I thought."

"Johnny! Please don't be so silly." She nearly fell off the curb as they started to cross Broadway and he made a quick grab for her. Safe on the other side he asked, "How about a nightcap?"

"No."

"I've still got money."

"But you won't have if you keep spending it on me taking me to dinner."

"Yes, I will. I've got a part-time job. I wasn't going to tell you for a while."

"Doing what?"

"In the office at college. And I've a good chance of being a student instructor if I pass my next math exam."

"But Johnny, you can't work and carry such a heavy schedule at college. You'll *kill* yourself."

"Would *you* care?"

This stopped her. If she said, "Yes," he'd probably kiss her right there on the street. If she said, "No," she wouldn't be exactly telling the truth. When she didn't answer he shoved her into a cafeteria.

"Coffee and pie?" he asked.

She nodded and sat down at a table to wait for him, watching him as he picked up a tray and went for their food. Why, she wondered, did she let him bully her so? If he'd only leave her alone and find some nice, sensible girl who wanted to settle down and raise a family.

He was a handsome brute, with shoulders a mile wide, and blond hair. She couldn't resist his boyish grin, and the blue eyes that always looked as if he had a little private joke all to himself.

He came with two steaming cups of coffee and two pieces of apple pie on the tray and sat down beside her. "You know, honey," he said, "I've been thinking; we ought to get married."

She sipped her coffee. "You've said that before. And I've said *this* before; on what?"

He gulped his coffee. "Well, I get seventy-five a month—they're talking about raising it to a hundred, and if I was married I'd get a little more. And now with my part-time job, and a little I've saved—"

"We could starve together just beautifully—*I* know." She cut off a piece of pie with her fork and pushed it around on her plate. "Besides, I haven't slaved over

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my dancing since kindergarten days just to get married and give it all up. I've *told* you and *told* you."

"Okay, then you can keep on with your dancing until I get that student instructor job. Only if that big bozo makes passes at you I'll—"

"He *doesn't* make passes at me!"

This wasn't the first time they'd had this kind of an argument and she had the feeling it was a phonograph record repeating the same conversation over and over. "I'm awfully tired," she said. "Let's go."

They took a bus to her room up in the West Sixties, and she was glad they couldn't get a seat together. At her door he said, "See you tomorrow," and didn't even try to kiss her.

Going upstairs she had the strangest feeling that she'd missed something. Johnny's kisses were always nice, but up until now she'd thought she could take them or leave them. Now, suddenly, she was all mixed up. She remembered Leon's kiss and wondered . . .

HER HERO-WORSHIP of Leon Nicholi had commenced four years ago when The Ballet Symphony had played a one-night stand in Whitehart, Indiana. She was fifteen years old and mad about the ballet. She and her mother had sat in the top balcony seats and she had watched with star-dusted eyes as Leon and Vera gave a performance more perfect than she'd ever dreamed could be executed by mere human beings.

As soon as the final curtain fell she had hurried down the long flights of stairs and around to the stage door, her autograph album clutched in her hand. Other girls were there too but she scarcely saw them. In the background, her mother waited, knowing it was useless to protest.

At last the wonderful Leon came out, followed by the beautiful Vera. The waiting crowd gasped, and Claire pushed her way to the front of the excited crowd.

"Please! Please sign mine!" she cried, holding up her album.

Leon stopped, turned, smiled down into her eyes, and her young heart grew wings. "You are a pretty child," he said, taking the album and signing his name with a flourish.

She smiled timidly. "*I dance too,*" she confided.

He raised his black brows. "So? You *jeeter* bug?"

"Oh no! Ballet. For years and *years*!"

He smiled and returned the book. "That is good," he said. "Maybe some day you will dance in my company. Come to see me in New York when you are ready."

Behind him Vera said impatiently, "Oh *Leon,* don't encourage these silly children. You will have every cow in the country thinking she can be a ballerina."

Leon laughed and hurried on to the car that was waiting for him, brushing aside all the other outstretched albums. And as the luxurious car slithered away with Leon and Vera, little Claire Vinson sighed. "Someday," she murmured, "I will be your ballerina, Leon Nicholi. And always I shall hate *you*—Vera Samaroff!"

Her mother pushed through the crowd and took a firm hold of her arm. "Come along home," she said wearily.

That had happened four years ago, but it was the reason why she had told Johnny Hartley repeatedly that she wouldn't marry him—the *real* reason, that is. She liked him more than she'd ever liked any man, besides Leon, but her career was her life and it was all tangled up with Leon Nicholi. For two years now, she had been dancing in the chorus of the Ballet Symphony because when she graduated from high school and caught the company in New York, he gave her an audition and hired her immediately.

But Johnny, whom she'd met on the train a year ago on her way back from a

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visit to Whitehart, was a persistent young man and just wouldn't listen to reason. So now everything was all mixed up.

A REHEARSAL had been called for ten the following morning to complete work on a new ballet of Leon's called, *Life in the City*. One scene had a romantic tone to it with a backdrop of Central Park. In it she had been given quite an important secondary part, by order of Leon. Also she was Vera's understudy for the entire ballet. Up until now Vera had accepted this with not too good grace but after the previous evening, almost anything could happen.

Her first definite clash with Vera came that morning as they were working on the Central Park number. In it, Leon made love to three girls on a park bench before finally settling down with Vera. Claire was the third girl and Vera, strolling along a path and seeing her boy friend kissing another girl, angrily yanks the girl from his arms and pushes her away so she can take her place on the bench.

The first time she did it in pantomine, as it should be played, with Claire leaving the bench at her merest touch and pretending to be yanked and pushed. But during the second rehearsal of the scene, Leon's kiss was more than make-believe. It was ardent and embarrassing. Vera, who had seen it as she left the wings and began advancing toward the bench, saw the difference, and this time she really did yank Claire to her feet. She pushed her so hard that Claire lost her balance and fell.

Their director, Sergé Dimitri, yelled impatiently, "For heaven sakes! Can't you even stand up today, Claire? Where were you last night?"

She managed to scramble to her feet in spite of the pain in her elbow. "I'm sorry. Shall we do it over?"

"Certainly not!" Vera cried angrily. "The girl just isn't good enough for such important parts." The last was directed toward Leon.

Leon grabbed his head between his two hands. "Shut up!" he yelled. "*You* are not the one to say who is good and who is bad. *I* do that. And *I* say Claire does this and the other parts. She is *very* good and you know it. You're only jealous!"

From around them indrawn breaths were held. This was the first time in the two years Claire had been with the ballet that Leon had openly championed any girl in the company in defiance of Vera.

The rehearsal continued through the morning and when they finished, Sergé said, "Now I have a surprise for you all. We are getting an extended two week run here, and next week we will put on *Life in the City*."

Claire let out a little cry of delight. This meant she would not have to wait for another whole year before appearing in

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really important rôles. She went to lunch fairly floating on clouds of delight.

Ada slid up on a stool beside her at the drug store counter. "Nice going, honey," she said. "Only from now on you'd better pack a gat."

Claire smiled and gave her order. "Isn't it wonderful?" she sighed. "I can hardly believe it. Pinch me and see if I feel it."

Ada leaned her elbows on the counter. "I'll leave the pinching for our ballerina," she said. "And if you don't think she'll do something to stop you, you're crazy."

"Do you think she'd dare?"

"Her? Are you kidding?"

CLAIRE DIDN'T tell Johnny the good news until Sunday morning. They were sitting in Central Park and he had an arm around her. "Well," he said, "I'm glad you're going to be around for a couple of more weeks, of course, but I can't get too excited about having you get so successful."

"Aren't you being rather selfish?"

He grinned and hugged her. "Sure I am. I'm the guy who wants to marry you—remember?"

She'd known for a long time she should stop seeing him because it wasn't fair to him, but there was a certain something about him that was comforting and hard to give up—like returning after a long journey.

"I remember, Johnny," she said, "but I'm not going to marry you—and that's final." Then gathering together all of her courage she added, "And this is the very last time I'm going to see you. There's no use dragging this thing on."

His arm began to trembled. "You don't mean that," he said in a rattley sounding voice. "We've grown to mean too much to each other these last six weeks."

"That's just it, Johnny. I'm getting frightened. I don't want to get married."

He took away his arm. "Not even to Leon—if you could get him?"

She gave him a quick sidewise glance and could feel her cheeks warming. She swallowed, unable to answer at once.

"That hit you where you live, didn't it?" he persisted.

She tossed back her long blond hair and her blue eyes avoided his. "You're being unfair, Johnny." Her own voice was whispy. "Leon and I are just friends—business friends."

Johnny lit a cigarette with quick, jerky movements. "I'm beginning to think that's not *your* fault." Then turning so he could see her face he said, "I noticed that kiss in the show the other evening. Wasn't that something new added to the part?"

Her honesty wouldn't let her deny it. "It wasn't *my* fault, I can assure you."

He leaned his elbows on his knees and carefully inspected his cigarette. "I guess maybe you're right, baby—you and I *had* better call it quits. I've been doing a lot of serious thinking the last couple of days and I realize now that even if my persuasive powers were strong enough for me to get you to marry me and give up your career, eventually you would regret it. And then we would both be miserable."

This was exactly what she'd been arguing for weeks—even months. But now that he put it in words; a cold desolation crept over her. The green of the park took on a somber gray look to match her mood.

"Please take me home, Johnny," she said.

He tossed away his cigarette and carefully ground it into the walk.

All the way home they scarcely spoke a word. At the door Johnny said, "Well, the best of luck to you. I'll watch for the reviews of *Life in the City*."

She met his eyes and a sharp pain slashed through her. "You don't want to see it?"

The expression on his face didn't change. "I'm afraid I wouldn't appreciate

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it now, under these circumstances."

They shook hands solemnly and then he turned and walked away. Watching his back she noticed the sag to his broad shoulders and then the tears curtained her view of him, so she hurried into the house.

THE OPENING OF *Life in the City* was scheduled for Tuesday evening of the following week and in her excitement and anticipation Claire didn't think too much about Johnny, although deep down inside her there was an empty sort of feeling that effected her appetite.

Ada noticed it and asked, "Off your feed kid?"

Claire nodded, "I guess I am excited about the new ballet."

Ada watched her face with shrewd dark eyes. "What's become of Johnny?"

She sighed. "We broke up. It's better that way."

"Is it?" Ada asked, and showed no surprise when she was given no answer.

Last minute rehearsals made it necessary for Claire and Leon to spend considerable time together. On Tuesday Leon invited Claire to dine with him. "There are several things I would like to discuss with you," he explained, "and it's so difficult with so many people always around."

She could not refuse him. "Thank you. You are very kind," she said timidly.

The rehearsal had been after the matinée and there was the evening performance scheduled for eight forty-five, so they did not have much time.

He took her to a Midtown hotel, where their entrance caused a stir. Claire glowed with pride and basked in reflected glory as all heads turned; but it was an unsatisfying glory—a glory that made her feel very lonely.

But Leon was a wonderful dinner partner and treated her as if she were someone very special, ordering things he thought would be good for her and talking to her as if he were completely unconscious of the fact that there was anyone else in the room. It was very flattering.

As they were having coffee he leaned across the table and captured one of her hands. Looking deeply into her eyes he said, "You are going far, my little ballerina." His voice was soft. "That Vera, she is through. She dances like a big cow lately." His hand was clasping hers tightly and she was tingling with excitement. "You really think I'm good?" she asked eagerly.

He smiled. "Would I put you in such important rôles if I did not?"

"You have been very kind," she murmured, turning her attention to the small cup of coffee before her.

He released her hand and leaned back. "It is easy to be kind to those we—love," he said with a sudden vehemence so unlike him.

Frightened she said quickly, "Hadn't we better be getting back to the theatre?"

HE MOTIONED THE WAITER for the check and they hurried out. He hailed a taxi, and directed the driver to go once around the park.

"Just to get us into the spirit of the Central Park scene," he said. Then forcefully and with a strength she could not combat, he gathered her into his arms and kissed her as she had never been kissed before, his firm, handsome mouth pressing hers. It was so unexpected. Often she had dreamed of a moment like this, but now that it was here it was all wrong.

He stopped kissing her and shook her a little. "What is the matter with you?" he demanded. "I thought you would be fire in my arms, but you are so cold, so passive!"

Like the snapping on of a blinding light when a switch button is pressed, his words brought a reality into the darkness in which she had been living for a long, long

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time. At first the realization was so blindingly bright that she couldn't see clearly the things before her, but gradually everything began to take shape and before her she could see a tall blond man with shoulders a mile wide who was buying coffee and pie for a dumb little blonde sitting at a cafeteria table.

Then the picture changed to a couple sitting on a park bench, the man saying, "I'm the guy who wants to marry you—remember?" And the girl was saying, "But I'm not going to marry you—and that's final."

She wanted to cry out to the girl and say, "You fool! You *fool*!" But she was too far away. And she was drifting, drifting to where the same blonde couple were saying good-bye before a rooming house stoop, wishing each other luck. But she knew they would never have any luck, not without each other. Only she couldn't tell them because she was too far away—in another world, it seemed.

"You are tired," Leon said. "I have worked you too hard. But tonight you will dance—dance, my darling, as you have never danced before, because I shall inspire you. My love will guide you. I will make you a star—and then you will be mine."

The taxi stopped and the driver in a bored voice called back, "This is it, mister."

Vera confronted them as they walked into the theatre, demanding, "Where have you two been?"

Leon pushed her aside. "That is none of your business!"

"None of my business?" she screamed. "Why you two timing—"

Claire ran to the spiral stairs and up to the dressing room before she could hear any more.

How she got through the first part of the show she didn't know. She danced like an automoton, doing her parts instinctively—*attitude, pirouette, entrechat,* and all the positions she knew so well.

And then the curtains parted on *Life in the City*. The first scenes went off well; one of early morning in the city, with the hurrying throngs; one of life in an apartment. She received adequate applause but nothing phenominal. Vera of course saw to it that she dominated each scene.

Then came the scene in Central Park. All evening she had tried not to search for Johnny's face in the audience. She was able to see only few rows back because of the footlights, but whenever Johnny came he always managed to get a seat so she could see him. But tonight he wasn't there. But of course he wasn't. Hadn't he told her he wouldn't come?

She was wearing a short, tight skirt for the Central Park scene and a low-cut, off-the-shoulder blouse. When Leon kissed her his hands were warm on her bare shoulders.

"My darling," he murmured.

From the corner of her eye she could see Vera advancing, her beautiful face dark with anger and jealousy. Suddenly as Vera grabbed for her, an equal anger flared up in her own breast. The memory of four years ago returned, and she could hear Vera saying. *You will have every cow in the country thinking she can be a ballerina.*

Vera's hand grabbed for her quickly and she dodged. Vera, not expecting the quick move, lost her balance and fell, sprawling, in Leon's lap.

The audience laughed—actually laughed at Vera Samaroff. Even Leon smiled, after the first shock of having Vera catapaulted at him. Then quickly he recovered himself and helped her around to the bench beside him and the show went on.

But when Claire realized what she had done she was so frightened she could scarcely dance. Her toes wobbled, and when Vera unexpectedly tripped her she fell backward. Down—down—with her

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right leg twisted beneath her. Her head hit the floor and a blackness closed in on her.

From far away she could hear a commotion and voices. She could hear a voice ask, "Is she badly hurt, Doctor? Will she ever dance again?" It sounded like Ada's.

And then a man's "I can't tell until I see x-rays. Maybe not until—later than that."

She opened her eyes. Several policemen were shoving someone toward the street door. She couldn't see who. Then everything wavered and was black again . . .

THE NEXT TIME she opened her eyes she was in a hospital room and a nurse and Ada were standing looking at her. "You all right, kid?" Ada asked anxiously.

She tried to smile but the effort was too great and she discovered her leg was bandaged up and trussed up in a traction splint. Hot tears ran down her cheeks and plopped on the pillow. "There, there, now don't cry," the nurse said, and went out of the room so that the two girls could be alone.

Ada had a newspaper in her hand. "Oh, it was beautiful!" she cried, opening the paper. "Just *beautiful*!" She held it so Claire could see. On the front page was a picture of the two policemen and they were holding Leon and Johnny firmly by the arms. The headline read:

ACCIDENT TO BALLERINA, FOLLOWED BY FIGHT, LOWERS CURTAIN ON BALLET

"Oh, how awful!" Claire cried reaching for the paper.

"Awful? It was *wonderful*!" Ada said. "That Johnny mopped up the floor with Leon—but good."

"But Leon didn't trip me. It was Vera."

Ada grinned. "I know. But Johnny had it figured out that if Leon had let you alone, Vera wouldn't have had it in for you—so it amounted to the same thing."

Claire sighed. "Then Johnny was there? And he said he wouldn't be."

"He was there all right," Ada assured her. "Maybe up in the balcony. But he sure was there and it didn't take him long to get around backstage after the curtain went down."

Claire's eyes shone brightly and her cheeks flushed with excitement and the nurse, returning said, "Perhaps you had better go now, Miss. We don't want to tire our little patient."

"All right." Ada leaned over and kissed Claire. "Bye, honey. And don't you care too much if you get fired. Your reviews were good so you'd be able to get another job easily."

"Fired?" Claire almost screamed, and then proceeded to have hysterics.

The nurse hurried Ada out and returned with a doctor who told her to give Claire a sedative and not to allow any more visitors.

SHE WAS in the hospital two months. The ballet went on the road and some of the girls came to say good-bye to Claire. Leon and Vera left without a word, but she received her salary regularly and flowers from the troupe every week.

Once Ada wrote that she'd been in town just for the day but hadn't had a chance to get to the hospital. She'd had dinner with Johnny, she said. It was so unlike Ada that it was hard to understand.

The day the cast was taken from her leg and the doctor told her she would be able to dance again after a few months' rest, she cried, but not because she would be able to continue her career. That no longer seemed important. Only Johnny's face, the feel of Johnny's arms, the touch of Johnny's lips, were important to her now. Only she had sent him away, told

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him that she didn't want to marry him.

One day she asked the nurse, "Has a tall handsome blond man with blue eyes ever been to see me or—or telephoned?"

The nurse looked sad. "Not that I know of," she said. "Should he have?"

She gazed out of the window at the brick building across the street. "No, I guess not. Forget I even asked." But Claire couldn't forget. She wondered just how friendly Ada and Johnny had become. She wondered if Ada would have sense enough to give up her career to get married.

Then one day Leon came in to see her. "We are playing in Philadelphia this week," he said bruskly, "so I flew up to see you. I know I should have come before but I detest hospitals and sick people."

She was sitting in a wheel chair and could walk with crutches. He eyed them with distaste. "They tell me you will be able to dance again in a couple of months. I was going to fire you but I have changed my mind. I want you in the ballet. It keeps Vera on her toes."

He smiled at his joke and Claire remembered how, long ago, Johnny's remark: . . . *and the biggest heel.* But she hadn't laughed then. Now she did. She laughed and she laughed and Leon thought she was laughing at his joke and he laughed louder.

But suddenly she stopped and said, "Leon, I have a surprise for you. I don't want to go back to the company. I—I don't think I ever want to dance again."

He stared at her. "Are you crazy?" he demanded. "What would you do?"

"I don't know. And I'm not crazy. I think it is the first time in my life I've really been sane."

He frowned. "Is it that big—big prizefighter?"

She smiled. "He isn't a prizefighter. He's an economics major at Columbia."

Leon glared at her. "You're a fool!" he said, as if he was spitting at her. "Besides, he has been taking out that Ada Revnik. She's with him here in New York today."

There wasn't anything to say to this, so she remained silent. And Leon, being uncomfortable by silences said, "I must go now. Good-bye. I shall put Ada in your place in the ballet."

Quietly Claire said, "Good-bye, Leon. And thank you for coming to see me."

For a moment their eyes met, he started to speak, then changed his mind, and stalked out of the room. She could hear his footsteps going far, far down the corridor until they disappeared into the silence. That seemed to be what everything in her life had done, gone far, far away and disappeared into the silence; first her chance to be happy with Johnny, then the admiration and love she'd thought she had for Leon, and finally her career—leaving her exactly nothing.

THE DAY she left the hospital she felt more lonely than ever before in her life. There was no one to come for her and she had no place to go but the furnished room up in the West Sixties.

When she got there, someone else was in the room.

"But where are my clothes and things?" she asked the landlady.

The woman grunted. "A girl who said she was a friend of yours came and took everything and said for you to come to this address." She scrambled around in a desk and produced a rumpled piece of paper with a Greenwich Village address.

Puzzled, Claire said, "Thank you," and went down to the street and hailed a taxi. When she reached the address it was a remodeled red brick house. She went up the steps she read the names beneath the mail boxes. One of them said:

Mr. and Mrs. John Hartley

A wave of sickness made it necessary for her to lean against the wall. So Ada

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had married Johnny and they were living here. But why did Ada want her to come here? It was cruel. Or was it just what she deserved?

Suddenly she discovered she was leaning against the bell and quickly she moved away from it, but not too soon because the buzzer began to click. Curious, she pushed the door open and a man's voice called from a back apartment: "Who is it?"

It was Johnny's voice and her heart turned over and then pounded viciously. "It—it's me, Johnny," she managed to say.

"Who?" he called. "Is that you, Ada?"

Without answering she forced her trembling legs to take her to the back of the hall, and there in an open doorway stood Johnny. He was all dressed to go out and when he saw her he looked surprised.

"Well—hello," he said. "Come in, Claire."

HE STEPPED ASIDE and she entered an attractive furnished living room. There were bookcases at one end and two large windows at the other. The furniture wasn't lavish but it was comfortable, and in good taste.

Johnny watched her reaction. Then he asked, "Like it?"

She nodded. "Did you and Ada do this?"

"Yep. All by ourselves."

A cold blackness seemed to creep over her and she swayed. Johnny caught her, and helped her to a chair. "Here, sit down. You shouldn't be chasing around alone when you're just out of the hospital. Ada should have gone up to meet you but—she thought it would be better not to."

There was a lump in her throat but there were no tears for her eyes. They were so dry they hurt. "I—I hope you and Ada will be very happy," she gulped.

"Ada and I?" Jack asked, sitting down on his heels in front of her.

She nodded. "And I'll take my things while I'm here, so they won't be in your way."

He stared at her. "Your things? What things?"

"Didn't Ada bring the things from my room down here?"

"No."

"Oh."

He took her hands. "Look kid," he said, "I think you're a bit mixed up. Ada and Sergé are engaged. She's nothing to me."

"But down on the mailbox it says, Mr. & Mrs.?"

He grinned. "Yeah. I decided to take a chance. The way I did with the apartment. You see, I got that student instructor job."

(Continued on page 93)

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BEAUTY SECRETS

By LYNNE SVEC

WE ALL ADMIRE HER—that beautiful and rare creature, the serene woman.

Men and women alike are a little—or a lot—in awe of a woman who has this definite lady-like air. She is poised. Self-assured. She dispenses graciousness and radiates charm and warmth. She is the essence of woman, of femininity. While often an inborn trait, serenity is a quality that can be acquired with practice.

By no means is serenity to be confused with a lackadaisical manner. True, the serene woman looks as if she has all the time in the world to devote her attention to you. But ideally, she is a "doing," efficient person, who has simply made time work to her advantage.

And she is relaxed. Relaxation is the all-important secret of serenity's success. By proper relaxation you conserve energy, time and vitality for things more important to you and others.

Relaxation takes many forms—can be obtained in many ways. Try the following to lead you on the path to serenity and radiant beauty:

Relax your skin and face muscles: When you are tired and look it, try a home facial. It will rouse your circulation, relax your tense muscles, wipe away a harried expression, and at the same time tone your skin.

You need a quiet room, a full half hour or more, creams, astringent, tissues, cotton, a dish of ice water—and lots of solitude. Your facial will do much more for you if you lie flat on your bed, a tray of cosmetics within easy reach. But sit at a dressing table if you must.

Apply cleansing cream, and with both hands make rows of little spirals outward over neck and face. Work slowly, lifting the skin on upward strokes. As you massage, keep eyes closed. Go through this routine first with your cleanser, then with lubricating cream, removing each cream with facial tissue.

Now squeeze a large cotton pad out of iced water, moisten with astringent, and pat your face and throat for several minutes until your skin tingles. Finally, cover your eyes with pads saturated with astringent, and rest for fifteen minutes with no pillow under your head, and your feet propped high.

Ease tension by relaxing your body in a luxurious bubble bath. The water should be tepid, the bubbles chin-high and the bath fragrant with the addition of bath oil. Cleanliness is your intent, of course. But that is secondary to your wish to be calmed, and "away from it all" in the hour you devote to your bath before bedtime. After it comes an application of bath powder to make your skin silky, cream or lotion to smooth your skin all-over, and bath cologne for an added "pretty-smelling" feeling.

Relax Tired Body Muscles

(1) Stand with feet a foot apart, clasp

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hands overhead, palms up. Now bend back from waist as far as possible, letting head go back too. Return to upright position, stretch. Bend forward as far as possible with head down and in. Return to starting position. Do ten times before bedtime to relax your body for sleep.

(2) Lie flat on floor, bend knees, clasp hands behind head, and lift head and shoulders up until you feel the small of the back pressing against floor. Return to starting positon slowly. From same position, stretch arms up to touch knees, lifting head and shoulders at the same time. Repeat five times.

Relax Your Eyes

Do the following twenty times daily to relieve eye strain and attain sparkling eye beauty.

(1) Open your eyes as wide as you possibly can, then shut them as tight as possible, contracting all the muscles around the eyes as you do so. Hold them tightly shut for a few seconds. Then open again and repeat.

(2) Holding your head completely still, think of an upper half circle, and swing your gaze from extreme left to right, tracing the imaginary curve of the circle. And blink strongly each time you swing from left to right. Then envisage a lower half circle and repeat the left-to-right process. So that the entire action is: left, blink, up, over, right, blink—then back to the left. The same goes for the lower half circle.

(2) Try "Palming:" Rest the heels of your hands on your cheekbones and cup your palms over the eyes. Stare into the darkness and alter this action by blinking closely. The eyes will close as relaxation sets in.

Relax Your Neck and Shoulders

Rotate your head slowly—slowly, as you sit with relaxed shoulders. Drop your head forward with a slow, heavy motion. Pause a second. Roll to the right. Pause. Open your mouth and let your head roll backward as far as possible. Pause. Then complete the circle by letting it roll to the left. Repeat at least once an hour, if you can snare the time.

Relax Your Hands

At odd times during the day just shake your hands and arms loosely from the shoulders. Jiggle your fingers in the direction of the floor as if you were trying to remove rings from your fingers by shaking them off. Or: Ripple your fingers fast, then slow, as if you were playing a swift piece on a piano keyboard. Another: Clench your fist vigorously, then throw

(Continued on page 94)

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Rivals in Romance

By MILLIE BREECE

SHE SHOULD NEVER have gone out with this big, blond Hal Williams, dark little Esther Blake told herself as they stood silent a too-long moment before her bougainvillea-entwined apartment door. There was something about him, bitterness perhaps, or tenseness, that hadn't shown when he'd appeared that afternoon at the exclusive Florida Hibiscus Club, of which she was all-year-round secretary.

Then he'd been gay enough, telling her he was a friend of her fiancé, Warren Conley of Chicago, and that, having learned of the engagement and happening to pass through Lakeview on his way to Miami, he'd decided to stop overnight and run out to see her. Welcoming him a little reluctantly, Esther had finally gone to Tampa with him for a Spanish dinner. But the whole evening had been oddly strained. And from several things Hal had said, she felt he wasn't really Warren's friend at all!

On the other hand, she was attracted to him.

Hal said now, in that voice that crazily stirred her and tugged at her heartstrings, "I've been trying all evening to get some-

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It was up to her heart to make the next move, when Esther discovered that she was only a pawn in the game of love.

thing off my chest. I'm not at all proud of myself for what I'd like to tell you, but—" He stopped short.

The white moonlight etched deep lines about his stern young mouth, made his blue eyes almost black. Somehow he made her feel very small, very dark, even in her pink lace dress.

She raised her chin. "Just what is this you'd like to tell me? Is it—about Warren?"

"Partly," he said.

Her laughter was scornful, husky. "Don't bother. I'm going to marry Warren. I'm not mistaken in him or in our love for each other. But I made the biggest mistake of my life going out with you this evening!"

Incredibly, she sensed Hal was a trouble maker!

"You'll make a bigger mistake if you marry him," Hal said. Then he added gruffly, "I'm sorry," and she was sure, miserably. "It's just that you—appealed to me so terribly. You're like—"

SHE'D TURNED SHARPLY to go in, but she stopped. Hal Williams, whoever he was, no difference how attractive he was, couldn't get away with this!

She whirled and faced him. "All evening, you've been leading up to this! I see it now! Every time I asked you about Warren, you changed the subject, shrugged him off. And you held me too closely when we danced. How Warren ever selected you for a friend—if he did—is beyond me. And I'd die before I'd listen to what you have to say!"

"I'd give a year of my life to kiss you," he said.

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He didn't speak for a long moment. The scent of jasmine was sort of overpoweringly sweet. His voice came, low. "I thought we got along swell."

"Swell!" She was glad she could laugh. "You're taking a lot for granted, aren't you?" Her cheeks flamed. She *had* liked him at times! He'd seemed sweet. He'd seemed somehow like a lost soul. Her lips curled at her dramatization of him!

When he'd mentioned Warren, he'd always hardened.

"No girl could like me, I suppose," he said now.

A queer lump came in her throat. This big fellow, with the curly yellow hair that any girl would love, was diffident, unsure of himself. He was impossible, but—

"Don't look at me like that!" he cried, low and savagely.

She was stunned. "Like what?"

"Like a girl I once knew. It's all there," he went on gruffly. "The eyes, the hair, the mouth! And I'd give a year of my life to kiss you."

"Don't dare!" It was a strangled little whisper.

How it happened, she never quite knew. But suddenlly Hal stepped toward her, and caught her close in his hard arms, and set his bitter mouth to hers.

The night rocked. There was the scent of jasmine in the soft air, and a stillness reaching to her heart. It was as if the world stopped moving and her heart stopped beating. For how long, she didn't know. She only knew this was a real kiss, such as she'd never known before. She only knew there could have been something betwen them, if she had met Hal before she met Warren, and if Hal Williams hadn't been a heel.

She tore herself away at last. She despised herself as much as she despised him. They faced each other, and she noted dazedly his face was white, and stern, and bitter, bitter.

"Good night," she choked, and whirled and went into her apartment. She wondered why she'd spoken even that much to him, and knew it was because she'd responded to his kiss, so that she couldn't blame him too much for kissing her. Or—for anything!

"Warren," she whispered into the pitch blackness of her room. "Warren!"

She undressed swiftly, got into bed and lay straight and still. What had happened tonight would never happen again. Some day, she'd tell Warren, of course. And she would be true to him the rest of her life.

Somehow she was sure he'd forgive her.

MAYBE SHE WAS too lonely here, she thought wretchedly, with no young company during the summer months, with no one to talk to but Mrs. Brown, the efficient, dynamic superintendent of the physical club work, and the lazy help. It was June now, and she hadn't seen Warren since early in March, when they'd become engaged.

He'd stopped at the Club last winter on his way to Cuba for a holiday from his gruelling engineering job in Chicago. He'd stayed, instead, with his parents who were established at Hibiscus for the season.

When first she'd seen him, her heart had turned over at his smiling gray eyes, his dark, thrilling good looks. She'd been at her little office window, where she was on duty evenings to take any letter or telegram any member wanted to send, and she'd glanced up to find a strange, nattily dressed young man watching her.

He'd sauntered over. "Take a letter, please," he'd said. " 'Meet me outside as soon as you're off duty. I'll wait on the dock for you, beautiful. No reply necessary. Yours, Warren Conley.' "

"I have the reply," she told him. "It's *no!*" She turned her back.

She heard him whistle softly as she busied herself with some papers until she knew he had gone away. And she thought

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that would be the last she'd see of him, because the secretary of the Club was not permitted to associate with any guest unless so ordered by a member.

But later that evening, stately, beautifully coiffed Mrs. Conley had approached her.

"My dear," she had said graciously, "we are driving to Tampa for dinner tomorrow evening. We would like very much to have you as our guest."

Something inside Esther had come to attention. This was an order, wasn't it? Had Mrs. Conley's son had anything to do with it?

Her cheeks flushed. "Thank you, I'll be very glad to go," she'd said.

That had been the beginning of her love affair with Warren.

Her love affair? She smiled a little in the darkness. It had been more than a love affair. It had been like being raked over the coals, at first, by Warren's parents. Esther had been investigated from A to Z by them, had been questioned as if she were a suspect or something. They had even written her former school—she learned that later from an old teacher—and gotten her record there. And Esther herself had told them that she was an orphan, that her father had been a struggling lawyer and her mother a member of an old Philadelphia family, and that she was single, of Scotch-Irish descent and twenty-two years old! And she'd gotten the job as secretary of the club because one of the oldest members had known her father!

But on the other hand, Warren had been absolutely, unquestionably, romantic!

There'd been the scent of orange blossoms, and jasmine, and kisses in a blue-black night beneath a million stars. And for the first time in a lonely life Esther had known what love could be.

At the end of six weeks, Warren had asked her to marry him, and she'd said she would. She was thrilled, excited—in love. She felt like a little brunette Cinderella, and Warren was her prince.

The elder Conleys approved, seemed to be elated. "Warren ought to settle down at twenty-six!" Mrs. Conley confided to Esther. "And we are so glad he waited for a nice, sensible, lovely girl!"

Sensible! Lovely! Esther's hands clenched. She had been swept off her feet by a false friend of the man she was going to marry. She had let herself be swept off her feet! And she loved Warren with all her heart.

She'd forget Hal Williams! And probably she'd never see him again . . .

BUT SHE DID see him again, the next morning.

She was working furiously at her desk, trying to summarize last month's expenditures for the club upkeep, when she glanced up and saw him standing before her. He looked pale and stern, older than he should have. He'd told her he was just Warren's age.

"I want to apologize for last night," he said. "I acted like a heel. I beg you to forgive me."

"Just forget it!" Her cheeks were on fire. "You're driving to Miami this morning?" With a tremendous effort, she made her voice cool, impersonal.

He didn't answer.

"You are, aren't you?" There was a crazy feeling of panic in her breast.

His hands shook slightly as he lit a cigarette. "I've got me a job here," he said.

"What do you mean?" She was on her feet, her hands gripping the edge of her desk. He mustn't stay around. He shouldn't dare!

His little grin was one-sided. "I'm never settled, didn't I tell you?" His blue eyes held hers. "But I like it here. So instead of going to Miami, I came out to the Club early this morning. The superintendent, Mrs. Brown, said she could

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use a man to look after the shiftless male help."

Esther said nothing, nothing.

"Let's blame my kissing on the moonlight," she heard Hal's low voice going on. "Or on the fact that you remind me of someone—as I told you."

"It's forgotten." She raised stormy eyes to his. She felt suddenly she was looking into bitter experience and disillusionment. Had the girl he was remembering hurt him very much?

And since Hal no doubt felt harshly toward Warren, had Warren come between him and—the girl?

It made no difference to her, Esther told herself fiercely. Warren loved her and she was going to be his wife. She wasn't the suspicious, probing type, either. She'd let well enough alone.

But she wished she were married. Maybe she'd wire Warren, hurry the day. She *would* wire him!

"Esther . . ."

She took up some papers blindly. "I'm busy," she said low.

"I'll be seeing you." He left her.

Why, why did he upset her so? Why did she feel drawn to him? Why did she sympathize with him when there was nothing to sympathize about? Why had she kissed him?

There was no answer.

She sent a telegram to Warren that morning.

LONESOME FOR YOU. COULD WE HURRY OUR MARRIAGE? ALL MY LOVE.

ESTHER

After she'd sent it she felt she'd been forward, possessive. She couldn't care. Warren loved her enough to be flattered, maybe.

All she had to do was await his reply. It came late in the afternoon. It read:

MEET ME AT MIRAMAR HOTEL MIAMI BEACH FRIDAY EVENING.

WILL BE MARRIED FIRST OF NEXT WEEK.

WARREN.

She felt stunned. But she'd asked for it, hadn't she?

She was staring into space when Hal came to her desk with some stationery supplies Mrs. Brown had sent her. After a moment he asked her, a little gruffly, "Is—anything the matter?"

She raised oddly weighted eyelids. "Nothing's the matter." Her forced smile wouldn't behave. "Warren just wired me we'd be married next week."

Hal lit a cigarette. "Is he coming here?"

"I'm to meet him Friday evening at the Miramar Hotel at Miami Beach. There are preliminaries, you know."

"This is Wednesday," Hal said unnecessarily. "Do you want me to drive you down?"

"No thank you." She was still in a daze. "I'll take the bus."

"Good enough." For a crazy moment their glances locked. Then he left her abruptly.

She put her cold hands over her face. She felt drained of emotion and strength. All she could think of was the look in Hal's blue eyes. They ought to be sunny and smiling . . .

But why should she be concerned. Hal meant nothing to her. She had work to do.

She knew there was a girl she could get to take her place at the Club, but she had to leave a clean slate behind. Besides, she had clothes to sort and press. If she worked like mad, everything would be all right.

BY MIDNIGHT she was so weary she could have dropped. Leaving her apartment quietly, she stole down to the dock where it was cool and peaceful. She had to get her thoughts in order, for they were in a chaos.

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She knew, when she saw Hal on the dock, that she had come there hoping to see him.

He didn't say anything, just came and stood beside her. He didn't touch her.

Against all her will power, she kept remembering his kissing her. Against all her will power, she kept wanting him to kiss her again.

He made no move to. After a while he tossed his half-burned cigarette far out into the gleaming lake, and turned, sitting on the dock rail and facing her.

"Well?" It was a whisper. She despised herself utterly.

He gave a short laugh. "Look," he said. "Don't take me too seriously. I'm jealous of Warren, I guess. For years," he went on tightly, "my dad has audited his father's personal accounts. About the time I decided to work my way through college, the job got too stiff for Dad, and I helped him, nights. Mr. Conley's what you call a tycoon, but he budgets every cent. So I found the exhorbitant amount of money alotted to Warren who was in my class at the University. But I liked Warren then. Later—I guess I began to resent his having so much, and always being one step ahead of me, even with the gals. That's the reason when I knew I was so near his fiancée, I thought it would be a good joke on him if I could interest her, since I had nothing better to do. But now—" He shrugged.

"Now?"

He waited a long moment. Wildly, she thought she hadn't heard aright, that he was fooling. When he went on at last she knew she had heard aright, and that he wasn't fooling.

"Now I think it's a good joke on Warren that the girl he's going to marry has kissed me and is willing to be kissed again."

It was over, she thought, his charm for her. With all her strength, she slapped his grinning mouth.

Then, as if a thousand devils were after her, she ran back to her apartment, closing and bolting the door.

IT WAS OVER. She didn't see him again. By early Saturday she was ready to leave. She called a taxi which took her to the Lakeview bus station and caught the big, gleaming bus to Miami.

She centered her thoughts on Warren. She loved him. The episode with Hal Williams was just something to regret, as long as she remembered it. But she wouldn't remember it too long.

Love was too precious to be ruined by even a memory of her own weakness, her own vulnerability.

After a while, the stars came back to her eyes.

It was dusk when she reached Miami. She took a taxi to the Beach, across softly glittering Biscayne Bay. There was a sunset of soft, deep rose reflected in the dimming blue water. It was like the end of a dream.

Reaching the imposing Miramar, she went in and registered. The clerk directed her to Room 416, which, he said, opened into a suite reserved for her.

Murmuring, "Thank you," she followed the bellhop. As she entered the gleaming elevator, and was whisked to the fourth floor, she felt chilled, apprehensive. But Warren would be waiting for her, and everything would be all right. He'd probably gotten the suite so they could share it, later.

When the bellhop stopped at Room 416, she tipped him and went in. The room was softly lighted, flower-decked, welcoming.

She saw Hal Williams rising slowly from a deep chair, his face a mask.

For a moment, she couldn't breathe. She stood in the middle of the floor, staring into blue eyes that stared back.

Hal was a despised stranger, and she was alone in the suite with him.

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"How did you get here?" She was stalling for time, stalling until she could think clearly, until she could stop her crazy trembling inside.

"I drove down this morning." His voice had a flat sound. "I've been checking up on Warren, though I haven't run into him. I learned from the desk clerk that this suite was reserved for you, and made it my business to get in—with a little cash and the lie that I was to be best man at your wedding next week. I had to see you! I—"

There was a knock at the door, and Hal said, "That must be Warren now." He opened it, and Warren stood there, looking blankly from her to Hal.

"What is this?" he asked sharply.

"Warren, I—"

"Don't blame the gal," Hal said easily. "I barged in. She never thought she'd see me again."

"Again?" Warren turned coldly to her. "If you've been two-timing me," he said with a kind of deadly finality, "I'll call the marriage off. I flew down here thinking you were lonesome for me, but now—" He sank into a chair, mopped his forehead with a white linen handkerchief. "You'd better just beat it, Hal," he went on, his breath coming quickly. "Esther'll explain everything to me later." His lips tightened. "But I'll marry her."

"After you tell the truth, for once, about Julie," Hal said.

The name seemed to hang in the air. *Julie . . . So that had been the girl's name.* Both men had loved her.

Warren gave a short, mirthless laugh. "Why bring the subject of Julie up now? She's of the past."

"I just wanted Esther to know about her, that's all."

"You wanted her to know?" Warren snapped. "What business is it of yours?"

Hal lit a cigarette and inhaled deeply. "I'm making it my business," he said. "I want her to know the kind of man she's going to marry, before it's too late."

"If you'd—just *go!*" Esther's nerves were near the breaking point. "If it's any satisfaction to you—you've made trouble enough already."

Hal's face went perfectly white. "Tell her, Warren," he said. "Or I'll tell her why you're marrying her."

WARREN BEGAN TO PACE the floor. Esther sank onto the sofa and looked at her hands. Hal stood with an arm across the little white mantel, pushing back some of the white gardenias that were banked there.

"Julie was a girl both Hal and I knew in college," Warren said stiffly. "She was not unlike you, Esther—small, dark, packed with dynamite. We all hit the high spots those days, slipping out to roadhouses every time we could. Julie got pretty high one night, and Hal was punch drunk, though he never admitted it since. He insisted on taking Julie home. I had a bigger car, and offered to take them both home. They agreed. But once outside Hal got rough and pushed me into the back seat and took the wheel. He drove too fast, with Julie beside him. I don't know just how it happened, but—"

"Go on!" Hal ordered, when Warren seemed to stall.

"The door beside Julie wasn't tightly closed," Warren said. "We were rounding a curve, and she fell out. An hour later . . . she was dead."

"Oh!"

The name Julie seemed to fill the room again. Julie, a small, dark girl . . .

Warren stopped before Esther. "That's the story, baby. Hal tried to crawl out of it, but it was no soap. He left college and has drifted ever since. He always was jealous of me," he went on. "But I never dreamed he'd try any funny work again."

He shrugged beautifully tailored shoulders. "As I said, Esther, you can explain sometime just how he happened to meet

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you. Just now, you and I have a date to get married. The parson and witnesses are downstairs, ready to come up when I call. And as soon as Hal leaves—" He made a motion toward the door.

It was like a drama to Esther. She could sense Warren's suaveness, his dominance over Hal. It probably dated back to when they were in college. Now Hal would go—

He didn't budge. "You didn't tell the story straight," he said levelly. "So I'll explain to Esther just why you're marrying her. Your dad wants to stop your chasing around, and is giving you fifty thousand dollars the minute he has proof she's your wife. I know, because I helped Dad prepare your father's budget for this year."

"Why, you—" Warren was livid.

Esther had risen. Everything seemed clear now, at least why Warren wanted to marry her. He didn't love her any more than she loved him! It had been her loneliness he'd appealed to, not her heart, as Hal had done.

Why, she loved Hal! Even though he'd acted like a heel, even though he'd accidentally caused a girl's death, she loved him. That's why she'd felt his charm . . . Her lips trembled. Hal—with his white, grim face—with his dusty suit and tousled fair hair—didn't seem to have charm now . . .

She made herself look at Warren who stood there glaring at her. "There isn't going to be any wedding," she heard herself saying.

"You little fool!" Warren stepped toward her, but Hal had him by the collar, was boosting him out of the room.

He closed the door, and turned and faced her. There was a sort of waiting silence between them, a throbbing silence.

"WELL?" She had to break it.

"So I put it over," Hal said. Tiny freckles stood out on his white face. She said, for something to say, "You must have loved Julie very much."

His eyes were clear and very blue. "I did. But—Warren told the story wrong. He was the one who was drunk. She started home with him. I—stuck with them, got into the back seat of Warren's car. He was driving, Julie beside him. His arm was around her, and he kept getting more reckless by the minute. Then the car started to swerve and when Julie screamed, I guess I lost my head. I tried to grab the wheel from Warren, reaching over his shoulder, and he stepped on the gas and the car careened. And Julie either fell out or—jumped out. When we picked her up—" He didn't go on.

After an eternity, Esther made herself speak. "Wasn't all this told afterward? It—it just *happened!*"

"I couldn't talk." The words seemed wrung from him. "I was shocked, beaten, because I'd loved Julie. Even when I was requested to leave the university, I couldn't talk. Julie was dead . . . Nothing else seemed to matter. But when the story that I had killed her began to follow me everywhere I went, I guess I hated Warren, especially when I learned he was the one who was spreading it . . . I suppose because Julie loved me, really, not him. But—" He squared his shoulders, "that's all water under the bridge. When I hunted you up, I was on my way to Miami, with the thought of seeing you in the back of my head! I wanted to look you over, maybe from curiosity, maybe with a miserable urge to strike back at Warren. But—when I saw you, I wanted to break up the engagement for your sake. Because Warren's—no good. But after I'd begun my dirty work, I felt it was none of my business, that maybe you'd be happy with him. So I made you hate me—that night on the dock . . ."

"I don't hate you." She felt done for, spent.

(Continued on page 97)

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By CYNTHIA

A STAR IS BORN

THERE'S ALWAYS A BIG KICK in being in on the birth of a new career, and I guess that's the reason I'm particularly happy to do this story on young Bill Lawrence. If the trend of his career in the past few months is any indication of success, then mark my words your next big croon sensation is none other than this talented, handsome youngster who was born with a heart in his voice.

Bill has won more acclaim and attention in the past few months than most stars win in years. In many ways his rise as a vocalist could be compared to that of Frank Sinatra, or more recently that of Gordon MacRae. He combines the best features of both these popular baritones, appealing to the younger set as well as the critics. Which you'll have to agree is a pretty good start for a boy just twenty-two.

I met Bill when he was singing with the Jimmy Dorsey crew last year. At that time he was contemplating making the break and trying it on his own. That's a big step, because the field is flooded with band singers who want to win fame on their own. Bill left the Dorsey outfit and one of his fans got him on the famed Godfrey Talent Scout Show. This show has discovered lots of new talent, but rarely have I heard an ovation as enthusiastic as the one that greeted Bill when he sang—and won.

As you probably know, the winner of the Godfrey show usually gets a week on Godfrey's morning program. Well, Bill broke the tape on that. Art offered him a regular spot on that show—one which Bill still has. That was the first step in his career as a "single." The next was a spot on that nationwide *Talent Jackpot*, another talent finder. Bill was on that show for weeks, and no competitor could touch him. *Talent Jackpot* got Bill theater engagements and he also landed a feature engagement at New York's famed Blue Angel Club.

Then came two more opportunities that were signs of Bill's extra special talent. RCA VICTOR signed him to a contract and informed the public that here was a new star. This meant he was signed, not as just another vocalist but one who would get their top tunes and special publicity. The second was the fact that famous publicist George Evans had taken over the publicity of young Bill Lawrence. George, who is one of the main reasons for Frank Sinatra's leap to fame, claimed that he would do the same for Bill; and so with the papers and magazines full of the rise

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of a new star, Bill came out with his first Victor recording, *Dreamer With A Penny* and *I'm Going To Miss You.* Only on sale a short time, it's already a big seller and a promise that this youngster has really found the formula for stardom.

BILL WAS CHRISTENED William Parkinson Lawrence. He was born in East St. Louis in December 1926 and has been pointing for a singing career since he was old enough to walk to school. Before he reached his teens he was the pride of the local radio station and high spot of many an amateur hour.

When Bill finished high school, he got a job in a meat packing firm, but intent on a singing career, he left the job and went to California. He worked days and nights as a messenger and an usher in a theater. This paid for vocal lesson's and the one good suit he donned to look for a radio or movie job.

His first break was winning an amateur contest in Los Angeles which brought a three-week contract in a local theater. Out of this he got a test in a movie studio, but, of all things the studio decided his voice was "too old for his looks." But the test helped. When Bill heard that Jimmy Dorsey was looking for a vocalist, he wangled the studio's audition record, sent it to Dorsey and got the job.

Bill was with Jimmy for a year, hitting the one-night stands, the top clubs and making records with the orchestra for MGM. One of his biggest records with Dorsey, *Confess*, was on the market when Bill sang with Godfrey just after he left the band. Next day, dealers throughout the country were flooded with requests, not for Jimmy's record of *Confess*, but for Bill Lawrence. Such is fame.

Now that success is within his grasp, Bill is working harder than ever to make his voice and style perfect. When not at work, swimming and bowling are his active sports, and boxing is his spectator pastime.

He loves all kinds of music. Chilled shrimp, raw onions and mushrooms; steak and chilled salads will bring a smile to his face, and so will a pretty gal. Marriage is something he plans to put off until he's in a position to raise a family—preferably with two boys.

From the looks of his career I'd say these last two items are very close at hand. I think you'll agree, and if you listen to his records, I think you'll find you've become a Bill Lawrence fan.

BILL LAWRENCE
RCA VICTOR
STAR

REVIEWS

★BLUE BARRON
and his Orchestra (MGM)
You're So Understanding—Mississippi Flyer

Don't pass up the Barron platter. The Guy is on a rampage with the hits and this one should be as big as *You Were Only Fooling* and *Cruising Down The River.* It's a real torch tune on the first side with Bobby Greer and the Blue Notes chanting soft and intimate. The band puts the accent on romance with a slow, subdued background. The reverse is a lively ditty and the style is reminscent of the late Glenn Miller and the choo-choo hits of the past few years. Jimmy McDonald, Helen Lowe and Betty Clark give a spirited rendition.

(Continued on page 95)

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Strange Aloha

By VIRGINIA NIELSEN

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PART III

Kathie's entrance to enchantment is pursued by danger and the shadow of love.

KATHIE EDWARDS played the rôle of a modern Cinderella, when, after inheriting a small legacy from her great-uncle Job Hammer, and a deed to some property in Honolulu she found herself on the luxurious *Lurline* en route to Hawaii. It had taken considerable courage to give up the only home she had ever known and to break off her "understanding" with Buck Landers, whom she had planned to marry some day. But from the moment Kathie invested in a glamorous wardrobe and set foot on the luxury liner she took on a brand-new personality. Almost immediately she was in the

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midst of a gay sailing party, which consisted of

SAM WARD, who was wealthy and handsome, and whose grandfather owned the Poinciana, one of the most exclusive hotels in Honolulu. He introduced her to.

ALEX NORRIS, a newspaperman, who seemed to Kathie the most exciting man she had ever met. She felt quite upset when she learned that some day he was going to marry

LEILANI POWERS, who was returning home with her attractive mother, BEA.

These people had accepted Kathie as if she were a life-long part of their sophisticated world, which was encouraging to a lone girl off on her first ocean voyage. There were times, however, when she wondered if they liked her for herself alone, or if their friendship were not prompted by the fact that she had in her possession a deed which might prove of great value. Kathie's suspicions were aroused before the ship was out of Golden Gate Harbor, when she realized that someone had searched her stateroom during the excitement of sailing. Any one of her new-found friends might be the guilty one. And she was on guard more than ever after Bea Powers informed her that Kathie's great-uncle was Bea's father's brother.

But in the days that followed, Kathie almost forgot her deed, for life on board ship was different from anything she had ever experienced. There were delightful, lazy hours in the ship's pool, and the soft velvet nights when the moon made silver magic, and Alex's kisses sent her heart into a tail-spin. Alex, who would probably marry Leilani some day. In which case why did he kiss Kathie?

There was also the night when someone tried to get into Kathie's stateroom. *Someone, who wanted that deed.* The next day Sam went with her when she handed it over to the purser.

As the ship neared its destination Kathie became apprehensive. What would happen when she landed in Honolulu with her diminishing legacy and the possibility that her deed might prove worthless? Kathie was filled with doubts as they rounded the point of Diamond Head and she knew that the wonderful voyage was over. But there was a final thrill in store when a gay party of natives came aboard and Sam presented *leis* to the ladies and kissed Kathie, with a warm, "Aloha, darling." Bea explained that Sam had ordered them on the ship-to-shore phone. Before the ship docked she promised Sam that she would stay at the Poinciana. They would all meet there later on for lunch.

Nevertheless, Kathie decided that she would leave the ship ahead of the others and check her deed at the Recorder's office. She must know right away whether or not it was of value. As she stepped onto the pier a taxi swung up to her before she could summon it. She was about to step in when she took a look at the driver, who was dark and foreign-looking. But it was not his darkness or his foreignness that made her hesitate. It was the look in his eyes. The strangest sort of recognition and curious speculation. With the precious deed clutched tightly in her handbag she hailed another cab and instructed the driver to take her to the Office of Records. A fantastic thought occurred to her. If Sam had been able to use the ship-to-shore phone to order *leis*, someone else could have used it to furnish a description—someone who knew she would be once more in possession of the deed. Just then a terrific jolt knocked her onto the floor. Frightened, she raised up quickly and peered out of the window. Another taxi had clipped them, and it was driven by the man she had spurned back at the pier!

CHAPTER TEN

Danger in Paradise

KATHIE STARED OUT at the crowd pressing round the two locked taxis. It would be impossible to get through it with any haste.

"Wassamatta you?" the driver of the taxi who had rammed them was shouting.

"Wassamatta me!" Kathie's driver screamed back in righteous indignation. "Wassamatta YOU? Why you no look where you goin,' you *pupule?* You want keel sumbuddy?"

"He did it deliberately," Kathie said in a shocked half-whisper. "He deliberately ran into us!"

A traffic officer had come up to the second taxi and the driver was shouting loud complaints at him. Kathie's driver jumped angrily out and ran back to enter the argument, leaving her alone in the taxi.

Kathie made a desperate decision. She moved abruptly and swiftly and left the taxi on the wrong side, jumping directly into the other lane of traffic.

While motorists swore and the traffic

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officer's whistle shrilled at her, she darted precariously to the other curb. There she joined the moving pedestrians, walking swiftly but not daring to make herself more conspicuous by running.

She had seen a bank on the corner at the end of the block and her panic-stricken mind had grasped at the memory of Mrs. Jensen's remark when they had opened up Uncle Job's strongbox to find the money and the mysterious deed.

"Job hadn't ought to have had this lying around the house," her neighbor had explained. "He'd ought to had it in the bank."

Kathie ducked through the glass doors as a young man unlocked them. They were just opening for business.

"I want to put this in a safe place," she said, breathless, not quite coherent.

He looked a little startled and she realized that "This" was still shut away in her purse. But she could not bring herself to unclasp the purse. Instead she held it tighter against her side.

"Do you want to rent a safe deposit box?" the young man asked her.

Kathie guessed that was what she wanted.

"Downstairs," he said briefly, indicating a marble stairway with VAULT above it in red neon letters.

With an apprehensive look over her shoulder Kathie went down the stairs.

WHEN SHE EMERGED from the bank, the street scene before her was one of such peaceful somnolence that once again she could almost convince herself her imagination had been working overtime.

The little eddy of bustle and excitement overflowing from the *Lurline's* dock had died away. Gone, too, were the two taxis and the knot of curious people that had gathered around them. Though she quickly looked around, Kathie could not even see any suspicious loiterers who might be waiting for her to emerge from the bank.

The sun beat down on the pavement and a group of laughing girls sauntered by her, followed by two reassuringly wholesome-looking young business men.

There was a handsome young policeman standing on the corner, and Kathie approached him and asked to be directed to the Office of Records. When she found it was only a short distance away, she decided to walk.

In less than two blocks she found herself out of the tight-packed business section, entering a widening street flanked with bright tropical foliage. Kathie walked slowly, her fear gone, enjoying the novel sights and smells of the island city.

She recognized the hibiscus blossoms in a lavishly-flowering hedge, but other blossoms were completely new to her. Even the trees were strange and exotic-looking to her eyes.

Above the building on her left she could see the mountains, green mantled, their heads lost in voluminous gray-white clouds.

With little difficulty she found the building and the office she wanted and told the purpose of her visit to a helpful and friendly young clerk.

He made a memorandum on a little pad and Kathie read it upsidedown:

Job Hammer. Phineas Redd. 1908.

Then he asked her to wait and went away.

Kathie sat on a straight-backed chair and looked out of the window, fascinated by each passerby. She was actually in Honolulu! And the news she received in the next few minutes might make all the difference in her future life.

When the clerk came back and smilingly asked her to follow him, she got up with a quickening pulse. As she entered the office to which he led her she was aware of a sweet, faintly spicy fragrance.

"What is it?" she cried, impulsively.

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The balding, heavy-set man who had risen behind his desk smiled and gestured toward the spiky hedge just visible below his windows. "My white ginger."

"It's heavenly," Kathie said, breathing deeply. And then she was caught by the curiously speculative look in the man's eyes, so similar to the look given her by the taxi driver she had turned down at the pier. Her senses were suddenly alert. This man knew something!

He gestured toward a chair and when she had taken it sat down again behind his desk. His next words proved that he at least knew why she was here.

"You have a property deed executed between Job Hammer and Phineas Redd?"

Kathie said, "Yes, sir."

"May I see it?"

"I didn't bring it with me."

Her eyebrows lifted. "Where is it?" he asked, and she had a sudden feeling that he did not believe her.

"In my safe deposit box."

"Here? In Honolulu?" He was frankly skeptical now. When she nodded he waited for her to go on, but she determined not to tell him of the events that had led her to place the deed in the vault before coming to him.

When he saw she was waiting for him to speak he said, "We have no record whatever of any such deed, Miss—Miss—"

"Edwards," she told him through suddenly stiff lips. Her heart had dipped abruptly.

"I believe you sent us an inquiry about this same deed by cable, Miss Edwards?"

"It was sent by a friend of mine."

"Quite so. I remember. We made a search at that time and found no record whatever."

"I—see," Kathie said forlornly. "That means my deed is—worthless?"

The bald man looked a little sorry for her. "Well, let's look at the facts," he said cheerfully. "I happen to be familiar with that piece of property. I know the man who has been paying taxes on it for the last forty years. Let us suppose that you do have a deed which conflicts with his title to the property.

"In the first place, it would take a court investigation to make your title valid now and set aside the existing recorded deed. You would have to be able to produce the witnesses to the deed, or to certify the signatures. I don't need to tell you that after forty years your task would be difficult, if not impossible. Phineas Redd is no longer living. If you are an heir of Mr. Hammer's, I assume he has passed away.

"Also, such an investigation would be very expensive, Miss Edwards. I don't know your circumstances but I can assure you the fees of private investigators, lawyers, and so forth, would not be small. And we are not yet considering court costs."

Kathie looked at him bleakly.

"And what would you gain from it?" he asked her. "Let us suppose after you had painstakingly collected all this evidence the court gave a decision in favor of your unrecorded deed. The court would no doubt require you to reimburse the man who has paid taxes on the land for the last forty years.

"He, of course, would owe you land rental for the same period. He would also be forced to buy the property from you—or continue to pay you land rental. But whether that would repay your costs in initiating the lawsuit is a debatable question.

"The land has been enormously improved in the last forty years, of course. But naturally those improvements would all revert to Mr. Ward, whose capital was involved."

KATHIE STRAIGHTENED, electrified. "Mr. *Ward*!" she repeated.

"Yes. Mr. Ebenezer Ward, of the Pon-

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ciana Hotel. According to the cablegram we received your deed purports to cover the beach property on which Mr. Ward built his hotel."

Kathie was pale with shock. "This Mr. Ward—Does he have a grandson named Sam?"

The man gave her a curious look. "I believe so."

It was incredible, Kathie thought. "But—does Mr. Ward know I have this deed?"

The bald man had a faint smile playing around his lips, a smile of cynical amusement. "He knows you claim to have a deed," he said, and Kathie was still too stunned to be angered by his disbelief. "Naturally I called him when a wire of inquiry came in. He assumed it was some crackpot, he said. His own deed to the property is recorded."

"You called him!" Kathie repeated again. "When was this?"

"Oh, about a month ago."

Her head and heart were both spinning madly.

Then Sam knew about the deed in her possession. He must have known about it from the beginning!

She stood up, still pale with her shock. She remembered to thank the man and got out of his office. Out on the street she walked dazedly, paying no attention to directions.

Bea Powers had impressed her with the wealth and influence of Sam's grandfather. And he—and probably Sam, too—had known long before she left California that she had a deed to the property their hotel stood on.

Sam had seemed to sincere in his attentions. She had instinctively trusted him. Yet in the light of all she knew now, it didn't seem possible that it was merely a coincidence that Sam's stateroom had been next to hers on the *Lurline*, or that he had wandered in that first night with a drink for someone else, quite by mistake.

She remembered her impression that Sam's ears had pricked up when she was talking to Alex about the deed at that memorable sailing party and how afterward he had warned her against talking to Alex, simply because he was a newspaperman.

And Sam had had the same opportunity Leilani and Bea had had to search her stateroom while she was on deck with Alex. It could have been Sam who tried her door that night!

She shivered as she remembered he had been with her when she complained to the purser about that. And yet he had been so sweet afterward, having her breakfast brought out on deck that morning, making light-hearted, sophisticated love to her when they danced in the evenings—and today even, ordering those lovely *leis* brought out on the tug.

Suddenly her heart froze. At the same time he could have ordered that sinister-looking taxi driver to pick her up at the pier!

Whom could she trust?

AS SHE WALKED the noises of traffic and the street gradually penetrated her shock, and she once more became aware of the subtle tropical differences in evidence about her—the relaxed, almost langorous way people moved, the absence of hats, the bare brown legs of the women, the occasional hibiscus, scarlet against a black coil of hair. Hawaii was surely a land of enchantment.

As her senses cleared she was aware of a deep longing to see Alex Norris again. Had she been wronging him all this time in suspecting him of trying to steal her deed? She had to know. It was tremendously important to her.

And she had to know why, if the deed was as valueless as the man in the Records office said, Sam, as she supposed now, had been making such strenuous efforts to get it away from her.

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She turned and retraced her steps to a taxi stand she remembered passing. There she hired a car to take her to the Ponciana Hotel.

The ride was away from the center of town and toward Diamond Head, which Kathie glimpsed now and again over a fringe of curving palm trees or through a gap in the low modern-style buildings.

The taxi turned into a garden, obviously tended but so luxuriant with growth it made her think involuntarily of a jungle, and drew up before a sprawling modern building.

Kathie paid her driver and walked through the open glass doors into a lobby that was spacious and cool and very tropical in decoration, all bamboo and woven glass matting, with everywhere hanging potted flowers.

On the far side of the lobby was another plate-glass wall and Kathie stood still, catching her breath. She could look directly out on the beach, and as she looked a long ribbon of white surf was rolling in, with a row of crouched brown bodies flying before it on invisible boards.

The poster! It was just as she had seen it on the poster in the travel agency's window, the picture that had practically hypnotized her into coming to Hawaii. It had been a dream then—now it was true!

Kathie watched with shining eyes until the last rider had tumbled or slid gracefully from his board. Then she turned to the desk.

Her luggage had already been sent up. She registered and was given a key and a message asking her to call Sam. She took the elevator to her room. To her delight it looked down on the same beach with the long curving ribbons of surf. Beyond, the sea sparkled and shimmered, that wonderful, incredible indigo blue.

Kathie stood before the window for a long moment, entranced. At last she turned back to the room, simply yet luxuriously furnished. With surprise and not wholly with pleasure she found that her wardrobe cases had already been unpacked and her clothes were hanging neatly in the closet.

Was it an excuse to make another search of her luggage?

The telephone rang. She picked it up and heard Sam's deep, eager voice with mixed feelings.

"At last!" he said. "How do you like your room? I selected it myself."

"Did you hang up my clothes yourself?" Kathie asked him tartly.

He laughed as at a good joke, but she thought his laughter was strained. "Darling, can you come up? Grandfather wants to meet you."

"And I want to meet your grandfather," Kathie said drily.

"Good, then. Take the penthouse elevator. I'll be waiting for you."

She took only long enough to comb her hair and freshen her makeup. Sam met her as she stepped out of the special elevator and ushered her into a rich drawing room with long windows of blue glass that gave her a sweeping view of Diamond Head and the sea.

There was no one else in the room.

SAM SAID, "Kathie, darling, it's so wonderful to have you here! I've been calling ever since I got in. Where have you been?"

She gave him a level look. "I've been to the Records Office checking on my deed."

His mouth opened a little, but he obviously didn't know what to say.

"You don't need to pretend you know nothing about it," Kathie said coldly. "I learned that my deed covers the property this hotel is built on, and that your grandfather knows I have it. You knew, too, didn't you, Sam?"

"Why, I—" It was strange to see him at a loss for words, he who was generally so completely self-possessed. "Kathie,

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please, let's not let this come between us."

"You knew, didn't you, Sam?" she persisted.

"Yes, Kathie, I knew."

"It wasn't an accident that you came into my stateroom that afternoon we sailed?"

"I wanted to get acquainted with you, Kathie."

"Because your grandfather told you to?"

"Kathie, I know it sounds rotten to you," Sam said unhappily, "but you've got to believe I didn't mean it that way. It's true that grandfather sent me to make an investigation after he heard about your deed, and he arranged that I should have the stateroom next to yours. But it isn't true that that's why I've spent my time with you. I did that because I wanted to."

"Was it your idea or your grandfather's that you should search my luggage?" Kathie asked him icily.

He flushed a deep scarlet. "Kathie, how could you think that of me?"

"And what about the taxi driver who rammed my taxi this morning after I left the ship with the deed in my purse? Was that one of your arrangements, too?"

"What?" Sam exclaimed, his head jerking toward her. There could be no doubt that he was genuinely shocked. Kathie watched him, her certainty waver ing.

He took a step forward and took her in his arms. She did not move, and after a second of suspense when their eyes probed each other's, full of anxious questions, he kissed her.

She had been so sure—and now she was so painfully unsure. Her heart beat heavily and her mind was a turmoil of incoherent thoughts.

A small dry cough made them pull apart. Sam's face was flushed and Kathie felt her own cheeks burn as she faced the small, eagle-eyed old man who had opened the door.

"Grandfather, this is Kathie Edwards."

"Welcome, my dear," Sam's grandfather said, in a suave but brittle voice. "Won't you come into my office?"

CHAPTER ELEVEN

"I Love Him!"

SOMEWHAT TO KATHIE'S surprise, Sam did not offer to accompany her into his grandfather's office. When she had passed the old man, who stood holding the door for her, he closed it.

"Sit down, please," he said. His manner was courtly but faintly arrogant. He wore a tropical business suit, but his feet were incongruously bare in odd-looking sandals.

Kathie took a chair and watched him shuffle across the carpet to seat himself behind his desk.

He was older than Uncle Job had been, she guessed. He reminded her of a dry leaf, wizened and wrinkled, crackling as it responded nervously to every breeze, awaiting the moment it would be blown away.

"You are aware that I am interested in an unrecorded deed you claim to have," he began at once. He had faintly emphasized "unrecorded" and "claim." He continued, and now she was sure of the contempt in his dry old voice, "Pray don't let that deceive you. Your deed has no value whatever."

Kathie said defensively, "If it is worthless, why did you send Sam to the Mainland to find me? And when he had found me, why did he pretend he knew nothing at all about me or the deed? Why was he so secretive?"

"My dear Miss Edwards, I will be frank with you," Mr. Ward said. "When I say your deed is worthless I mean exactly that. On the other hand an instrument such as you claim to have represents a mild threat to my interests. Unfortunately

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there are certain unscrupulous lawyers who would make a lawsuit out of it merely to get their jackal's share of such an action. They might even be able to get an injunction that would tie up my business while the suit was in progress.

"While I would not be in the least concerned over the outcome of any such suit, I would deplore the type of publicity it would bring and the possible interference to my business. Now do you understand why I sent Sam to investigate the report that came to me from the Office of Records?

"As for what you call his secretiveness—Sam is young and in some ways still rather irresponsible. When he reported that you had engaged passage for a trip to Honolulu, I cabled him to return home—that I preferred to deal with you personally."

Kathie said innocently, "If the deed is worthless, I don't understand why Uncle Job had it at all. How did you get possession of this property, Mr. Ward?"

"My dear girl," he said impatiently, "I bought this property from Phineas Redd for five thousand dollars some forty years ago, and the deed has been on record almost that long. Where your uncle got his deed, or why, I have no idea.

"Both your deed and mine can't be genuine, or Phineas Redd sold this property twice. And if your deed is the genuine one, why did Job Hammer never have it recorded? Why did he never claim the property or challenge my deed? You wouldn't have a leg to stand on in court, young lady—if that is what is in your mind."

Kathie sighed and shook her head. "You needn't worry, Mr. Ward," she said, and rose to her feet. "I'll be frank with you, too. I haven't money enough to take the deed into court even if I wanted to."

"I appreciate your honesty," the old man said drily, and his tone made Kathie realize that he probably knew all about her financial situation. "In return I am going to make you a generous offer. Just as a matter of insurance for the hotel, I am going to buy your deed for five thousand dollars. This is the amount I paid Phineas Redd for the property and so would represent the value of your uncle's deed at the time it was executed—if it were the only one in existence."

He was smiling at her now, his keen old eyes somewhat warmer. He did know how little money she had, Kathie realized, and began to wonder if he were just being kind.

But she hesitated.

He pulled open a drawer and took out a large checkbook. "Do you have the deed with you?"

"No."

His head jerked up and his eyes seemed hooded once again. "Where is it?"

"In a safe deposit box."

For a moment his eyes held hers. Then he put away the checkbook. "Bring it to me, and I will give you five thousand dollars," he repeated.

"I'll think it over," Kathie said.

"Very well." His manner dismissed the subject. "You are comfortable? Your room is satisfactory?"

"Oh, yes, sir."

"Good. I'll let you go back to Sam now. I'm sure he's getting impatient. You are very pretty, my dear."

Kathie flushed. "Thank you."

He opened the door of his office and followed her into the living room where Sam stood before the long windows.

"She's a nice girl," his grandfather said. "Are you going to marry her?"

Sam's look as he turned around was startled. He laughed, "Now, wait a minute, Guvnor. You're rushing us! Although it isn't a bad idea," he added, smiling down at Kathie. "Shall we discuss it after lunch?"

She was thankful for his light tone.

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"Not before!" she said, in mock horror.

Smiling a little, Sam's grandfather told her good-bye and returned to his office.

SAM TOOK HER OUT to the special elevator. "I'm tied up with the Guvnor until late this afternoon," he said apologetically. "He wants to go over some business with me. I'll call you when I can, or find you on the beach. You're going to have a swim, aren't you?"

"Probably." Kathie felt a little strange with him. His kiss and his grandfather's unexpected question had subtly changed the easy relationship between them.

After the elevator had carried her from sight of him, she realized that his kiss had not affected her one way or another. She could remember no reaction but the odd tension with which she had awaited it.

Too much had been happening to her, she thought. Too much and too fast. Her emotions were confused.

Her telephone was ringing when she reached her room. It was Bea Powers. "Where have you been, child? You're joining us for lunch, aren't you?"

"I didn't realize it was so late!" Kathie exclaimed.

"We're all in the lobby. Can you come right down?"

"In just two minutes," Kathie promised. And her heart began to beat faster as she wondered who "we all" were?

As she quickly freshened her makeup and hairdo once more, she reflected soberly on her interview upstairs. Sam had been so genuinely shocked by her accident in the taxi that she could not believe he had been responsible for it. And she believed, also, his denial that he had been the one who searched her stateroom aboard ship.

His grandfather had been openly contemptuous of her deed, and his assertion that it was worthless was corroborated by what the man at the Office of Records had told her.

And yet Mr. Ward had offered her five thousand dollars for it!

Kathie's values had changed since Uncle Job's fifteen hundred dollars had looked like such an enormous sum to her. She realized that five thousand was not much to a man as wealthy as Sam's grandfather. And yet she was shrewd enough to know that even a man like Mr. Ward would not give anyone that much money from the goodness of his heart.

"So I'm right back where I started," she told herself as she locked her room and took the elevator for the lobby.

Someone was awfully interested in that deed, more desperately interested than Sam or his grandfather were—for *someone* had searched her stateroom, and *someone* had bribed that taxi driver at the pier this morning, she was sure.

But *who*—if it had not been Sam—and *why?*

She pondered what Mr. Ward had said about the adverse publicity to the hotel in case of a lawsuit. Could it be that someone who realized that was hoping to blackmail Mr. Ward with the threat of a suit—someone who had more money to back up the threat than she did?

It was the only theory that seemed to fit all the inexplicable facts.

IT WAS WHEN she saw Alex standing with Leilani and Bea Powers in the lobby that she suddenly recalled he was a newspaperman. Who would know better about the value or the threat there might be in publicity?

A queerly sharp pain went through her in the region of her heart. Her eyes were shadowed as she greeted him, and her smile was not quite true.

He stood between Leilani and Bea, both of whom looked fresh and pretty in pastel linen dresses, and he towered above them. His smile for Kathie was one-sided, as usual, and his gray agate eyes seemed to hold a question.

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A curious wave of weakness went through her. For she knew that she still could not trust him. And she wanted to so desperately.

"Where have you been all morning?" Bea asked Kathie. "We were sure you were lost."

"I've been very busy," Kathie said evasively.

"I'm starved," Leilani said. "Let's go in."

The dining room was almost entirely surrounded by glass, jutting out into the garden, with one wall facing the beach.

"Don't you love it here?" Bea asked. "You know, Sam will inherit all this. He's being groomed to take it over now, they say. I believe his grandfather intends to retire soon."

"I'm not surprised," Kathie remarked, thinking of that brittle-dry little figure.

"Oh, have you met him?" Bea pounced on her at once, her eyes sharp with curiosity.

Kathie had spoken before she thought, and she was sorry now. She nodded, somewhat embarrassed.

"But my dear, he's a fabulous man!" Bea cried. "He's one of our leading citizens, you know. Of course, he isn't very active any more. Just sits up there in his penthouse and pulls the strings. But he's quite famous in the Islands. A philand—what am I trying to say, Alex? Not philanderer!"

"Oh, Mother!" Leilani protested.

Alex laughed, his eyes crinkling almost shut. "A philanthropist? Go to the foot of the class, my pet. A philanderer Mr. Ward may have been in his younger days, but certainly not now."

"What's a philanderer?" Kathie asked.

"A male flirt," Alex told her.

Bea made a provocative face at him and Leilani said again, disgustedly:

"Mother!"

There seemed to be a strain between mother and daughter and Kathie could not help wondering if it could be a result of Bea's pushing the girl in the direction of Sam Ward. Leilani herself seemed to prefer Alex.

They consulted the menus and discussed the Island fish offered. Alex was sitting between Kathie and Leilani—Bea's maneuvering again—and his hand touched Kathie's slightly when he made a suggestion, pointing to her menu.

He drew quickly back. Does he resent me that much? she wondered in confused hurt.

Bea's eyes were speculative. "Kathie, why don't you fly to Hilo with us tonight?" she asked abruptly. "Wouldn't you like to see the place where your Uncle Job was raised?"

"I would," Kathie admitted. "Very much."

"Of course it's changed unbelievably since his time, but you would enjoy it, I know."

It often seemed incredible to Kathie that the talkative, worldly, sometimes annoying woman could be a niece of Uncle Job. Yet there was one trait they had in common. For all her light and gushing chatter, Bea Powers was shrewd, Kathie knew. And Uncle Job had been no fool.

Belatedly Kathie realized that Bea might hold the key to her strange deed. She couldn't have known Uncle Job well, for she must have been a child when he left the islands, but through her father she must know some details of that early life of Uncle Job's that was so shrouded in secrecy.

Distrust and the urge to keep the conversation away from the object of her visit to Hawaii had kept Kathie from discussing her uncle with Bea Powers, after that first discovery of their kinship. Now she realied she may have been making a mistake.

Leilani was urging her to return home with theim. "You'll love Hilo!" she said. "And we'll have such fun."

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"Oh, I do hope there's a seat left on the plane!" Bea exclaimed. "I'm going right now and telephone. Alex, order the *ulua* for me, there's a dear."

"Wait a minute," Alex protested, with a lift of his eyebrows. "Give Kathie a chance to accept your invitation. Are you sure you want to leave all us fascinating Honoluluans so soon, Kathie?"

Did he mean Sam, Kathie wondered? She knew he wasn't speaking of himself.

Leilani said, "Don't be silly, Alex. You know you're flying over for the week end. You've promised."

Kathie's eyes widened as she turned to him. "When do you work at being a reporter?"

His grin slanted wickedly. "Oh, I'm always snooping."

"What about it, Kathie?" Bea urged her.

"I'd love to go," she said, and Bea excused herself to go and telephone.

"What about your deed?" Alex asked Kathie when she had gone. "Have you finished your business in Honolulu so soon?"

So that was what he really wanted to know! Kathie's eyes flashed. "Are you snooping now?"

He was not at all abashed. "That's my profession."

"I'm sorry to disappoint you," Kathie said coldly. "The deed is worthless."

His mocking grin faded. "I'm sorry, Kathie," he said, and he sounded sincere. "I'm truly sorry."

She shrugged. Leilani was looking on curiously but she did not ask any questions. The waiter appeared at Alex's elbow, and by the time he had finished ordering Bea returned with the news that a plane seat was available.

KATHIE DID NOT see Sam before she left. She could not reach him by telephone and had to be satisfied with leaving a message.

After a swim on the beach before the hotel there was barely time to pack her bags again before the Powers and Alex, who was seeing them off, were calling for her, ready to leave for the airport.

Alex was driving his own car, and when he reached the downtown area he turned toward the mountains.

"Where in the world are you going, Alex?" Bea asked.

"Kathie can't leave Honolulu without seeing the Pali," he said. "There's plenty of time."

He was driving up a street that gradually left the reisdential section behind and narrowed into a winding mountain road. Great trees entwined by a jungle of vines hid the steep mountains on each side of the narrowing ravine, except for occasional glimpses.

Abruptly they came out of the trees to the summit, and Alex pulled off the highway. Kathie cried out at the vista of valley and sea that lay some three thousand feet below them.

From where they had stopped the road zigzagged narrowly down the face of the mountain, so steep as to be almost a sheer cliff.

Kathie shivered. "It makes my knees weak," she said, and they laughed at her.

Later, along the road to the airport, Alex stopped to buy an armful of *leis* from the *lei*-sellers, and for the second time that day the women were garlanded with sweet-smelling blossoms.

Kathie said ecstatically, "I never saw so many flowers at one time—unless it was at Uncle Job's funeral."

The remark struck Leilani and Alex so funny that they laughed until Bea chided them for bad manners.

Alex kissed both Bea and Leilani goodbye, and Leilani threw her arms around his neck with a rush of emotion that struck sharply at Kathie's heart. He turned to Kathie then, and for the space of a heartbeat he hesitated.

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"I can't be impartial," he said, his grin wicked, and took her in his arms. She went cold all over at his touch, but when their lips met, the blood flowed back into her veins with a warmth that was dizzying.

He turned away quickly, leaving her pale and shaken. She heard Bea cry, "Hurry! It's time to go aboard!" The alohas and good-byes came faintly to her ears as from a long distance. Dazedly she boarded the plane and let Leilani, who sat beside her, show her how to fasten her safety belt.

Leilani waved and made frantic sign language gestures through the porthole to Alex, waiting below. Kathie lifted her hand, too, but forgot to lower it. She stared at his foreshortened figure, bareheaded, his thinnish face creased by a one-sided smile.

I love him, she thought, with a frightened lurch of her heart. Whatever he is, whatever he's trying to do—*I love him!*

CHAPTER TWELVE

Job Hammer's Secret

IT WAS KATHIE'S first flight and she stared out of her porthole in fearful fascination as the great machine skimmed the concrete runway and lifted its nose toward the sea. She caught a last glimpse of Alex's dwindling figure standing under the coconut palm trees before the terminal.

When will I see him again? she wondered, with a sense of emptiness that was alarming.

She tried to tell herself she was being silly. Wasn't Alex following them on the week end? Why should she have this strange oppression, as of some impending doom?

The sea glittered below them and the already familiar contours of Diamond Head seemed squat and low as the plane circled toward it. Gradually the beauty of the scene unrolling beneath her lightened Kathie's strangely heavy mood. The coastline was scalloped and edged with a lacy froth of white surf, and the ocean was a blue that made her shiver with pleasure.

"Almost home," Leilani sighed happily beside her. "I can hardly wait to see the gang again."

Kathie looked at her, feeling a wistful envy. "You're very lucky," she said impulsively.

"Why on earth?" Leilani demanded, with a quick smile.

"I don't even have a place I can call home any more," Kathie told her. "You have everything, Leilani. A home, friends, money—"

Leilani gave a short laugh, quite unlike any other Kathie had heard from her. "Money, did you say? We're as poor as church mice."

"You can't be as poor as I am. You've been traveling—you've bought a lot of lovely new clothes—"

"Aren't you traveling?" Leilani asked her. "Didn't you buy new colthes for your trip?"

"Yes, but. . . ." Kathie finished her thought mentally. She did not want to admit even to Leilani how little her capital was and how alarmingly it had shrunk.

Leilani was franker. "We haven't got anything but a lot of debts," she said, cynically. "Bea had a business iron in the fire in San Francisco, but I don't think anything will come of it. Actually, she thinks I'll marry money and pay off our debts."

Kathie looked at her, a little shocked. "Sam?" she said. "But you don't love him, do you?"

Leilani hesitated, her lovely eyes clouded. "He's rather sweet, isn't he?" she said, after a moment. Her tone changed subtly. "And so terribly rich," she added mockingly. "So far you have the edge with him. Are you going to grab him?"

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"Leilani!" Kathie protested, embarrassed.

"Oh, don't be so romantic! You haven't any money, either, have you?"

"That doesn't sound like you," Kathie said slowly. It perturbed her to see Leilani's charm marred by such frank calculation, even though the calculation was so obviously her mother's "Besides, isn't Alex wealthy enough?"

"Oh, his grandfather has the newspaper and some other property," Leilani said, with a careless shrug, "but it's all tied up and there are too many descendants sharing the income. Whoever marries Alex will have to live off what he earns as a reporter for a long time. He might eventually manage the paper after his grandfather dies, but the estate will still be split umpteen dozen ways. Alex is related to half of Honolulu, I do believe!"

It sounded like a wonderful life, Kathie thought, but she refrained from saying so.

"Look! There's Molokai!" Leilani said, and she turned to look at the long, low island rising like a dim blue shadow from the sea.

They saw other islands as the hour passed, and when Leilani spotted the peak of Maunakea, visible briefly between the clouds, Kathie thrilled with her to know the short flight was almost over.

Bea's brother-in-law was waiting at the Hilo airport with a car. As he drove them to the Powers' Kathie marveled at the lush tropical gardens, even more striking than the ones she had seen in Honolulu.

But it had been a long and very full day and she was drooping with weariness. Dusk was falling as they turned into the garden of a low, comfortable house on the hillside above the town, and Kathie was having a hard time keeping her eyes open as she was led through the beautiful rooms to the one she and Leilani would share.

A sweet-faced little maid brought her a glass of milk and a sandwich which Bea insisted she have, but Kathie fell asleep with the half-eaten sandwich on a tray beside her bed.

IN THE MORNING she wakened to a cool, shuttered room and the piercingly sweet songs of what sounded like hundreds of birds outside her window. Leilani had already risen, and a moment after Kathie opened her eyes she put her head in the door and called a cheery good morning.

"Breakfast on the *lanai*," she said. "And you can come in your pretty negligée if you wish."

Leilani was already dressed in white shorts that showed a maximum of slim tanned legs, and a colorful jacket cut with an oriental straightness of line that was called a paké.

Kathie jumped eagerly out of bed. "I'll just be a minute," she promised. As she showered in the pretty pale blue bathroom, she thought of Leilani's claim that she and her mother were "poor as church mice."

I wouldn't mind being poor like this, Kathie thought enviously.

After a moment's consideration, she dressed in a playsuit almost as brief as Leilani's shorts.

Bea was pouring coffee at the table on the broad porch Leilani had called the *lanai*. Screened, it jutted out into the garden to give a view of rolling, clipped lawn, a fantastic many-trunked tree, and bright splotches of colorful blossoms against the green of hedges that shut out adjoining lawns.

Tiny delicate orchids floated in a crystal bowl on the table and Kathie cried out in pleasure when she caught sight of them.

Leilani said, with careless pride, "Oh, there's a whole patch of them in the back yard. I'll take you around after we eat."

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Long wedges of chilled fresh pineapple were at each place. Kathie sat down and took the cup of coffee Bea offered before she unfolded her napkin.

The sun danced on the velvety lawn, green with that fresh-washed look all the grass and foliage in the Islands seemed to have. The birds were somewhere out there, invisible but happily vocal.

Kathie said again, "Oh, you lucky, lucky people!" and with a sigh attacked her pineapple.

The telephone began ringing before they had finished breakfast. Leilani's friends had already received the news that she was back home, and her breakfast cooled while she answered their calls. In between she came back to the breakfast table to report new invitations and plans.

There was to be a *luau* the next week end. They had returned just in time, Leilani said happily. She repeated bits of gossip to her mother and chattered so animatedly that she scarcely found time to eat.

THEY WERE still at the table when the first carload of young people arrived to welcome Leilani home. There were *leis* again and more gossip. Some one suggested they go see someone else, and they piled into cars and began what turned out to be a series of informal visits, the "gang" snowballing at each stop.

Kathie met more girls and young men than she could possibly remember and found herself drawn into a life so gay and casual and relaxed that it all seemed like an extraordinarily pleasant dream.

Leilani's friends made a hospitable fuss over her guest. Kathie must see the Rainbow Falls. Kathie must see the wild ginger along the Kilauea Highway to the Volcano House. Kathie had never been to a *Luau?* Incredible! They must do something about that! And what about a beach party down at the Black Sands?

In one lull it occurred to Kathie to ask Leilani how she and Alex had grown to be such friends when their homes were on islands some two hundred miles apart.

Leilani gave her a curious look. "Oh, heavens, I went to school in Honolulu!" she said, somewhat impatiently.

It was when they returned home late in the afternoon that it struck Kathie all over again how strange it was the Powers should be Uncle Job's family! She couldn't imagine two worlds more different than her life with Uncle Job on the farm, and the life Leilani Powers and her mother were leading here.

She said as much when Bea asked her at dinner that night how she liked Hilo, and the older woman's eyes flashed a quick interest when she mentioned Job Hammer.

But she only said again, with a vague wave of her hand, "Well, of course, it was quite different in those days."

"I wish you would tell me how it was," Kathie begged. "Uncle Job never talked about it at all."

"I can understand that," Bea said lightly.

"What do you mean?"

Bea shrugged. "Of course I don't know anything except family gossip, but there was a story—"

"Oh, mother, not now!" Leilani broke in. "We have a date for the movies, and we'll never get ready if you start rehashing old gossip!"

"But I want to hear it!" Kathie protested.

"Some other time!" Leilani insisted, and she had to give in.

It was not until two days later, when Leilani was visiting a friend that Kathie had her opportunity to talk with Bea about her great-uncle.

Bea had gone to her room to rest but Kathie knew if she did not seize this moment there might not be another one free of interruptions. Nevertheless, she crossed

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the floor of the bedroom she shared with Leilani a dozen times before she could make up her mind to confide in the older woman and ask her for information.

"Yes?" Bea's drowsy voice answered to Kathie's timid knock.

Kathie entered her bedroom. Bea was reclining against some pillows on a nardow *punee*, a carelessly folded silk scarf lying across her eyes.

"I'm sorry," Kathie said hesitantly. "I did want to talk to you alone, but if you would rather I didn't—"

"What is it that's so important?" Bea asked in an amused tone, without removing the scarf.

"It is about a deed Uncle Job left me," Kathie said. "A deed to some land in Honolulu."

"Yes?" Bea's tone was still light, but the girl noticed that her body seemed to have frozen into attention. She had a sudden notion that Bea had been waiting for this moment, that it was for this she had been asked to Hilo.

KATHIE SANK DOWN on a taffeta hassock near the *punee*. "I can't understand it," she said in a troubled voice. "I thought maybe you could help me figure it out. Why did Uncle Job save the deed all those years if it was worthless? Or for that matter, why the deed at all—when there's another one to the same property, and from the same man, Phineas Redd?"

"Let's start at the beginning!" Bea said. She had thrown the scarf to the floor and her eyes were wide awake. "What deed, and who told you it was worthless?"

"The man at the Office of Records. It isn't recorded. And Mr. Ward's deed has been recorded for forty years."

"*Mr. Ward!*" The effect of his name on Bea was similar to the electric shock Kathie had felt in the Office of Records. She sat up straight. "Let me get this straight, Kathie. Where does Sam's grandfather come into this?"

"My deed covers his property, they tell me."

"Which property?"

"The land the Ponciana Hotel is on," Kathie told her.

Bea stared at her, her eyes widening. At last she said in an overwhelmed voice, "This I must see! Where's your deed, Kathie?"

"In a safe deposit box in Honolulu."

Bea lifted a plucked eyebrow. "You didn't lose any time putting it there, did you?"

"Someone has been trying to steal it from me."

"*What?*" The exclamation came so sharply Kathie jumped.

"I thought perhaps you knew something that could explain the whole thing," Kathie told her. "I can't figure it out."

"Did you talk to Mr. Ward about it?"

"Yes." Kathie told her about her interview with Sam's grandfather.

Bea nodded. "He offered five thousand dollars?" There was a gleam of excitement in her eyes. "You were wise not to take it. I think I know a way it can be much more valuable to us, Kathie. Will you leave this to me?"

"But I don't understand—"

Bea sprang up and began walking up and down the room. She was alive with excitement and it made her a totally different person. Her rather gushy social pose had fallen away and the woman Kathie saw now was a shrewd and purposeful one, someone who could be dangerous . . .

"I'm only guessing myself, Kathie," she said. "It was pretty hush-hush in the family, but I've heard my father speak of it. And apparently this is what happened. Uncle Job was a pretty gay bachelor. My father was already married and settled down at the time. It seems Uncle Job came to him in the mid-

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dle of the night and told him his life had been threatened. Something about a quarrel arising out of a poker game. He had to leave the Islands hurriedly."

She paused and then went on, almost absently, as if she were thinking something out while she talked, "A few days after he left a man's body was found on the slopes of Diamond Head. He was a man Uncle Job had been seen with, and the police wanted to question him. Naturally, when they discovered how hastily Uncle Job had left Hawaii."

Kathie, sitting wide-eyed on the little taffeta hassock, had gone very pale. *Murderer!* Uncle Job a *murderer?*

Bea said sharply, "What is it, Kathie? Don't you feel well?"

"I feel—dizzy," Kathie faltered.

"I'm a beast!" Bea said, in self-reproach. "I didn't even think that it might be a shock to you."

She had her arms around the girl and, supporting her, led her to the *punee.* "Lie down," she ordered. "No, head down. You'll be all right in a minute. *Suki!*" When the maid appeared, she said, "Bring some cold water."

"I'm all right," Kathie insisted. "Please tell me—"

"Sh!" Bea said, as the maid came hurrying back. "Just leave it to me. I've got a hunch that may help us. But I've got to dig up some more information first."

BEFORE THE MAID had left them again, they heard the crunch of the car tires on the drive and Leilani's voice humming a phrase of music.

"That will do, Suki!" Bea said abruptly. And when they were alone she cautioned Kathie, "I don't want Leilani to know anything about this, Kathie. Will you promise me to say nothing to her? Nothing at all?"

"All right," Kathie promised.

The door burst open and Leilani said, "Suki said you were sick, Kathie? What gives?"

"It's probably the climate," Bea said. "She should slow down until she's used to it, instead of chasing around like a firewagon the way you've been doing."

"Golly, I'm sorry!" Leilani said.

"I'm not sick!" Kathie protested, getting to her feet. "I just felt a little dizzy."

"She'll be all right," Bea said. "But she had better take a rest during the heat of the day, at least until she gets acclimatized."

"I'll see that she does," Leilani said cheerfully.

And under the weight of their urgings Kathie found herself going alone to the room she shared with Leilani to take a little nap. She was not sleepy, but she was not sorry to lie alone in the shuttered room, with time to sort out her milling thoughts and to try to adjust herself to the new picture Bea had given her of the great-uncle she had lived with so long.

Could he have murdered a man?

Over and over Kathie reviewed her memories of him. And again and again, shuddering, she was forced to admit she did not know. There had always been an element of fear in her feeling toward the stern old man. And there had always been the mystery of his background.

She could hear Mrs. Jensen saying, when they discovered the deed to the land in Honolulu: "So that's where he came from! I always wondered?" And Mrs. Jensen had been a neighbor of Uncle Job's for thirty years!

It could be true, Kathie admitted, sick at heart. It *could* be true.

But that still did not explain the deed, or why Bea had been so excited about it. An impression was growing in Kathie's mind that Bea Powers had not told her all she knew about that old crime.

(Continued next month)

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(Continued from page 49)

blew her nose, dried her eyes, and returned. He whirled as she entered. "All right, let's get this thing settled. Why those tears? Marnell?"

She shook her head and tried to push past him to her desk, but he caught her arm, turned her around, and forced her to face him. "Don't you understand why I told you that I was badly mistaken about my feeling for Helena? I asked you then, why you didn't give her some competition for Marnell, and all you said was that you didn't run after men. Which was a big help to me. But he's out of circulation now, and if you really don't love him, then whom have you been torching for since Helena managed to monopolize him?"

Not daring to let herself believe what she saw in his eyes, Paige whispered. "Perhaps if you'd tell me whom you're in love with—"

"That's what I'm trying to do. It burned me so that night at the Kincaids', seeing you in that pink dress, playing the guitar, and looking at Marnell so starry-eyed that I realized how much Helena rated with me. Nothing, exactly nothing. That's why I dragged you away in such a hurry, too mad to let you stay there with that stuffed shirt. Honey, I guess I fell in love with you when I saw you coming down the stairs there that night, so dressed up and wonderful, your eyes shining, and ever since I've been almost crazy from loving you while I thought that Marnell was breaking your heart."

She laughed, a catch in her throat, eyes misting. "Nick was just a crush, that's all, and I got over it when he turned out to be exactly what you said he was. Then the next thing I knew, I was in love with you. Really in love this time," she added breathlessly as his arms closed about her.

DANCE, MY DARLING

(Continued from page 63)

"But—"

He looked so silly sitting there on his heels, but being there so close to him was heavenly. If she could only lean over and touch his lips with hers. Only of course she couldn't, after the way she had treated him.

"When are you going back to the ballet?" he asked.

She looked away from him. "I'm not going back. Leon came to see me and told me I could come back but I told him I didn't want to."

"Why not?"

She couldn't answer and he said, "Look at me, Claire."

So she looked at him and that blinding light she'd experienced before began to shine in her eyes.

"I didn't come to you while you were in the hospital because I found out that wasn't the way to do it. I decided I'd let you come to me—if you ever *wanted* to come. That's why I took this apartment and got Ada to help me to furnish it."

He was holding her hands tightly.

"You mean—" She was almost afraid to ask the question.

"I mean—I still want to marry you. Now and always. And the Mrs. down on the mailbox is for you, if you want to take on the title. It isn't as grand as that of ballerina, but . . ." He smiled, "I think it will be lots more fun."

The light began to shine brighter—

Looking deep into his eyes she said, "I'm sure it will be more fun, Johnny. And seeing my name on our mail box as Mrs. John Hartley will be much more thrilling than seeing the name Claire Vinson in mile-high neon lights."

"I've waited a long time to hear you say that," he told her as he took her into his arms.

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(Continued from page 65)

your fingers wide and stretch them as powerfully as possible.

Relax Your Feet

Do this with a salon-like pedicure. Immerse feet in warm, soapy water. Scrub feet and toes with a brush. Rub dry with a coarse towel. Use a little pumice on callouses, or use the smooth side of an emery board. After the foot bath, trim toe nails straight across, push back cuticles. Apply colorless nail polish, then two coats of favorite nail polish shade. Over all, a protective top coat. Massage oil or cream into your feet to keep them soft and smooth. Extra foot benefits: walk around the house in bare or stocking feet. Pick up a towel, wash cloth or pieces of paper with toes. Pull your toes. Wiggle your toes. Spread toes wide, then crumple them in the direction of the ball of your foot.

Relax Your Scalp

Grasp handfuls of hair and tug from the roots. Or embrace your head on both sides with hands spread wide and force the scalp back and forth, from side to side.

Relax Your Walk

But do not your posture. Don't stride like a madwoman. So long as your chest is carried high, with your head set back, your shoulders will be borne easily and gracefully. When your chest is high, your abdomen will come up and in and hips will naturally tuck under. Your next move is to swing legs in an easy stride from the hips.

And now for a secret of mental relaxation. It is simply: memory. Pleasant, happy memory of something you have seen and enjoyed seeing, brings relaxation to the mind. Return mentally to some favorite spot—a view of the ocean, a forest brook, a waterfall, a mountain top. Whatever the happy memory, it will relax you.

Of such things is composure made. Composure is serenity. Serenity is relaxation. It's something you can do to attain a serene look—and relax others in your presence. It is certainly a look of beauty that others will long remember.

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RECORD ROMANCE

(Continued from page 75)

★PERRY COMO (Victor)
Forever And Ever—
I Don't See Me In Your Eyes Anymore

Perry offers two star-dusted sentimental ballads. *I Don't See Me* has been flooding the airwaves for the past few weeks. It's a real torch ballad and Perry does some eloquent song selling. It will get under your skin. The reverse is coming up more slowly, but it's definitely Hit Parade material. It's an unusually moving love song, building to a climax with a vocal chorus. This type of tune is Perry's meat, and yours, too, if you're a softie for love songs.

★GORDON MAC RAE (Capitol)
I Get Up Every Morning—
The Right Girl For Me

Another brilliant vocal triumph for Gordon. It should make his fans very happy. *I Get Up Every Morning* is a moderately paced rhythm ballad. Paul Weston's orchestra plays it in a light, swaying tempo as Gordon chants the romantic lyrics supported by the superb vocal harmonies of the Starlighters.

The reverse is a hit ballad from the new MGM film, *Take Me Out To The Ball Game*. It's a lovely, melodic tune that I think you'll go for. Gordon sings lyrically of the things that will happen when he meets *The Right Girl For Me*.

ALBUM BETS

Victor's *Kiss Me Kate* series. This isn't really an album, but one general release of Victor stars singing the music from *Kiss Me Kate*, brilliant new musical success. Alfred Drake, of the show, sings *So In Love, Were Thine That Special Face*. Jane Pickens offers *Why Can't You Behave* and *Wunderbar*, and Henri Rene and his band offer *Wunderbar* and *Were Thine That Special Face*. Swell collection. You'll love it.

KISS ME KATE (Columbia). This is the greatest album of the season. The complete score of the show by the original cast including Pat Morison, lovely soprano star, and Lisa Kirk, new comedy hit. Don't miss it. It's tremendous and beautiful.

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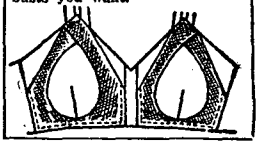

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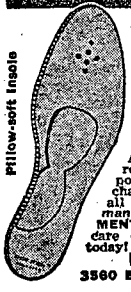

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(Continued from page 51)

with the growth of the individual, his maturity, his changing emotions, thoughts, feelings. Your own script changes completely from the first time you wrote right up to the day you stopped developing. Your own writing shows much versatility, ability, action.

S. C. A small "constructive" style of writing such as your boy friend uses is typical of the chemist, the scientist. Details are important to him, for he knows how they can make or break a project. Carried over into personal life it means he might be rather finicky, fussy, critical. His work would accentuate the trait if it is in his nature.

M. S. The reproduction of George Washington's signature you saw was not "messed up" with a mark over it. President Washington was noted for the funny little line he tossed off above his signature. Many of us have an "underscore," or a line underneath the signatures. Our first President was unique in that he flourished a wavy line directly above his, significant of those who have rated some attention, who also like to see everything balanced.

H. C. Handwriting which suddenly tapers off into a wiggle, just an illegible style, is found in the person who is overly diplomatic, who may say a thing but give the opposite impression.

B. B. When the "B" is large, round, slanting to the right, you know that the writer is good natured, friendly, happy. We think of fat people as being good natured, this "fat B" is the graphological counterpart.

M. E. Your husband's writing shows more drive, will power. He is a man who gets what he goes after. A real "he man."

J. B. K. When a person "doodles" a name, then retraces it a dozen or so times, he is trying to impress this person on his subconscious. The man may be talking on the telephone to a friend, find himself writing the friend's name, then going over it again and again. In order to keep his thoughts from wandering the doodler is using this method to help him keep his mind on the subject.

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(Continued from page 73)

"But today when you were to meet him, I knew I had to try again to break up the engagement. I thought if I had a showdown with Warren, in your presence, he'd prove what he really was. And I had that ace up my sleeve about the fifty thousand dollars. You'll never forgive me—"

"But I do!" Crazily she understood what he'd been through. Loving Julie, losing her. Being blamed for her death when no one person was really to blame because it had been the tragic climax of a chain of events caused by two boys in love with the same girl.

"Please go!" Esther cried wretchedly. She couldn't stand much more.

"In a minute."

Hal came to her swiftly, a little awkwardly. He put a brown finger beneath her trembling chin and tilted her face up to make her look into his eyes. "You believed in me," he said hoarsely, low. "Even when I explained my side of the story, you sent Warren away. Julie—"

"I'm not Julie!"

"I know. You're Esther. You're the girl who just gave me courage to pick up the pieces of my life, to go back to Chicago where I belong, and start over. Courage enough—to ask you to be my wife."

"W-why?" She had courage, too.

"Because I love you," Hal said. "I've loved you since first I saw you. Because you're little, and dark, and sweet. Because you're you. Darling . . ."

She cupped his lean face in her two hands and drew it down to hers. "I'm your girl," she whispered. "I'm the girl you're going to marry."

He caught her to him. He kissed her. There'd been someone else for each of them, but now they were all in all to each other, because it was meant to be.

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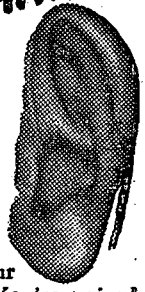

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NEW LOVE MAGAZINE

(Continued from page 6)

For A Western: "The Red Pony" with Myrna Loy, Robert Mitchum, Louis Calhern, Sheppard Strudwick, Peter Miles (Republic). Technicolor.

Not in a sense a true Western, but a picture laid against a ranch and a boy's dream about a pony come true, which even the most calloused Western picture-goer will find moving. Unlike most horse pictures, people remain the central characters in this John Steinbeck story. As the story unfolds you see the boy (Peter Miles) growing apart from his father (Sheppard Strudwick) through his love for his pony and the hero-worship of a ranch hand (Robert Mitchum) who helps him raise the animal. Myrna Loy, as the mother, understands the boy and the byplay with her husband about their child is adult. It all resolves itself when the pony dies and the boy takes a closer step to manhood.

A simple story, well-told and rich in human values and colorful backgrounds.

• • •

For Murder Drama: "Too Late for Tears" with Lizabeth Scott, Dan Duryea and Don de Fore (United Artists).

Mysteriously, Jane Palmer (Lizabeth Scott) and her husband acquire a leather bag containing a fortune in cash. Although she is determined to keep it, her husband thinks differently and checks it at Union Station. With the help of a blackmailing crook (Dan Duryea), Jane drowns her husband, but they fail to find the claim check for the money. The husband's sister and a stranger (Don de Fore), who arrive on the scene, locate the check. Jane takes it at gun's point, sheds herself of the blackmailer with a dose of poison and flees to Mexico.

Suspensefully played, the picture makes for some spine-tingling moments.

by Ted Palmer

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